



THE LONG GALLERY

BY

EVA LATHBURY



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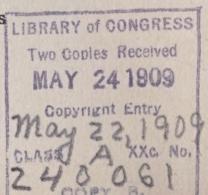
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE EMERALD NECKLACE	3
II.	TABLE TALK	13
III.	A LADIES' BATTLE	24
IV.	THE COMEDY OF PROTECTION	32
V.	Some of the Horrid Details of War	47
VI.	A TREATY IS SIGNED BUT RATHER CARELESSLY	
	SEALED	53
VII.	A HAUNTED HOUSE	67
VIII.	THE TYING OF KNOTS	80
IX.	GRISELDA LEAVES THE BEATEN TRACK	92
X.	TRESPASSERS ARE LIABLE TO BE PROSECUTED	102
XI.	On the Advisability of Destroying One's Cor-	
	RESPONDENCE	116
XII.	A CASTLE IN THE AIR	121
XIII.	THE FACE IN THE GALLERY	132
XIV.	A FAMILY RETAINER	143
XV.	THE DELICATE AND DIFFICULT ART OF EVASION .	155
XVI.	Dorset Comes into Property	164
XVII.	Dorset Comes into More Property	170
XVIII.	FAIRIES AND FOOD	180
XIX.	Mist	190
XX.	THE MAN WITH THE SCAR	201
XXI.	ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF EARLY RISING	214
XXII.	A PORTRAIT OF ALVA, LADY SOUTHERN, BY AN	
	UNKNOWN ARTIST	223
XXIII.	THE VIRTUE OF THE MOUSE	238
XXIV.	Peter	248

Contents

		PAGE
THE HISTORY OF THE BLACK PEARL		. 255
THE HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN		. 269
THE MOUSE AGAIN		. 281
A LOST NAME		. 288
THE WAY ALL THE STRAWS WERE BLOWING		. 298
A QUESTION OF FIFTY POUNDS		. 305
A QUESTION OF MORE THAN FIFTY POUNDS		. 318
THE THIRD AND LAST DEMAND		. 326
THE CASE FOR THE DEFENSE		. 339
Dream-People		. 350
	THE HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN	THE HISTORY OF THE BLACK PEARL THE HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN THE MOUSE AGAIN A LOST NAME THE WAY ALL THE STRAWS WERE BLOWING A QUESTION OF FIFTY POUNDS A QUESTION OF MORE THAN FIFTY POUNDS THE THIRD AND LAST DEMAND THE CASE FOR THE DEFENSE DREAM-PEOPLE

THE LONG GALLERY



CHAPTER I

THE EMERALD NECKLACE

ALL things are said to come to those who can afford to wait, but Lady Southern could not afford this luxury.

An elaborate clock upon an equally elaborate mantelpiece struck seven, and she realized that now—if ever—she must make an effort. "Griselda," she said, and tapped sharply with her foot upon the brass fender-rail in order to cover the slight tremolo in her plaintive voice.

The figure on the low window-sill at the far end of the

room turned listlessly.

"Time to dress, mama?"

"No, but time to stop this nonsense."

"What nonsense?" the girl inquired, with a quick intake

of breath that might denote anxiety or defiance.

"You know very well," said the elder lady, buckling to her task more confidently; "the fact is, you've been allowed to play the baby much too long. If your own commonsense doesn't tell you it's time to grow up, I must. What

do you suppose I brought you here for?"

"Just to provoke me," Griselda retorted, with heat of her own. "It was my last term—the last week of it—and I was to play Rosalind in the break-up party, and you dragged me off here at a minute's notice to this pompous old Mrs. Fawcett's nasty house which breathes of money, and planted me down among these stupid, sleepy people, and now I suppose you're vexed because I won't talk to them."

"You needn't talk to them all, Griselda."

"Mama, you're going to be horrid."

"I'm going to be frank, my dear. Don't you know that we can't afford to turn up our noses at our neighbors how-

ever stupid they may be? Don't you know that there's one way—and only one—by which we can recover our lost position? Don't you know that Mr. Dorset made his first overtures to you and not to Alva Dane?"

"Well, he's as poor as a rat."

For an instant Bertha Southern was completely non-

plused.

"Was that the reason—" she began blankly, but a low thrill of melodious child laughter disposed all too speedily of

her pleasant suspicion.

"Of course not. I can't be bothered with pounds, shillings, and pence; but—you see—even if I hadn't choked him off with my fit of the sulks, it wouldn't have been any use."

"Griselda, I'm going to tell you a secret."

"Oh, mama, no. I don't want it; I couldn't keep it."

"But this particular one affects your whole future."

"Bother my future," said the young lady, leaving her seat and crossing to join her companion at the fireside. "I'm sure I'm happy enough, or I should be if only Peter would give me that new mare of his; I borrowed her yesterday and she's a little ripper, as indeed she ought to be;—she's grand-daughter to 'Starlight' and daughter to 'Wind-of-the-Hill' and 'Buttercup.' I can say the ten commandments all right when I'm in church, but when I'm on her back I'm aching in every nerve to possess her."

"Do what I tell you, and you shall have thoroughbreds of your own," her mother said with decision. "Listen to me. This young Dorset is a country product like yourself, and he'll drift back there in spite of all this talk about

Uganda."

"But he's going almost at once; he told me so; he may be called up to London any day—for orders, I suppose; he's going to be a Commissioner."

"He may go to Uganda," said her mother firmly, "but

he won't commission out there very long."

"Why not?" Griselda asked, forgetful of her dislike of secrets.

"Because his elder brother can't live the year out, and Harry will be recalled to take his place—and a nice little place it is: a charming Scotch estate in the heart of the country."

"Who told you, mama?"

"Annie Dorset herself. I met her in London in the spring, distracted, poor soul, because her husband had got his death-warrant and snapped his fingers at it; he even

forbade her to speak of it."

"And you tempted her to disobey; you're awfully clever, mama, but," again her eye twinkled mischievously, "there's one point you've overlooked—no, to be strictly accurate—there are four—four jolly little kids, as Mr. Dorset called them himself."

"Girls," said Lady Southern, with soothing emphasis; "girls—every one of them—and as incapable of saving their poor mother from penury as you were yourself, Griselda. I can't but see," she went on more gently, "the finger of Providence in this affair; it seems to me more than coincidence. I have dropped out, but for you there is a chance; the very same law that ousted you so cruelly now promises to reinstate you. I brought you here, I own it candidly, to meet this young man. It isn't a grand marriage I'm advocating; there's no title and no large income, but there's a home of the exact quality you like and could adorn suitably."

"So he's not an ineligible, after all," said the girl, but it was evident her imagination was not following the other's lead. "And if Mrs. Fawcett knew what we know," she added musingly, "she might allow Alva to choose him."

"Griselda, you are very, very young. Don't you know that Mrs. Fawcett can ask a very different position for her heiress than I can ask for you? Alva is the only child of Mrs. Fawcett's only child—Emmy, who died at her birth; George Dane has remarried—an American—and lives over the water; and this great house and two others and goodness knows how much money will all go to this girl; young Dorset might just as well ask for the moon, and he'd have

been just as likely to do so if you'd behaved with common civility."

"I know, but having once looked at Alva he won't be

able to look away again."

"That's nonsense. Alva's nothing but a pretty picture, and pictures may be moved from wall to wall." Once more the clock chimed—the quarter this time—and a silence supervened.

The woman on the wrong side of forty looked at the girl on the reckless side of nineteen with no consideration for the tie of blood between them, with no cry but that of baffled vanity in her heart. In this young face she could trace and retrace each delicate charm of which she had been gradually, pitilessly despoiled; it spelt for her the mirror of twenty years back before which the happiest hours of her existence had been spent and this god of her idolatry had played her false. Her cheeks had been round and rosy as Griselda's, her eyes of the same limpid blue that so seldom survives childhood; her hair, black instead of brown, had evinced the same delightful tendency towards revolt, and, if her aspect had lacked the hint of complexitythe bizarre effect of russet upon a dead white skin-that lent to her daughter's face an arresting quality, there are many who cavil at this physical incongruity and prefer the unadulterated brunette.

Bertha Venner had assuredly been the recipient of general admiration and she had, as assuredly, weighed and measured; she had bullied what she had of blood and spirit; she had staked her all on her powers of calculation, and she had lost. She had chosen George Southern from at least a dozen strings all offered more readily to her bow. George had been difficult, but she had secured him in spite of this reluctance, in spite of the unmistakable scars of warfare on his handsome face, in spite of the whisper of her so-called nearest and dearest friends, who did not hesitate to insinuate that a name other than her own haunted the heart of the young baronet. She had laughed airily enough, insisting that it was the name at once of a child and of an ad-

venturess-that it belonged to the history of all men of family and spirit. It certainly touched nothing that she herself wanted. It was the house, the name, the position, that she sought and took, not that chimerical dwelling in which his early emotions might have been bred and suffered. The wedding had been a hasty and informal affair owing to the sudden death of Sir George the elder, but the mourning robes had been quickly laid aside and the reign of extravagance begun. But it was a reign short and sweet. After five years of childless marriage Griselda came to the empty nursery at The Court, but, alas, no little brother came to play with her or-what was infinitely more important-to establish his mother's claim to this desirable new empire; and eight years later Sir George, putting his favorite mare at one of his own park fences, broke her back and his own and died a few hours after, whispering his last words-not to the hysterical wife or the little child he had just begun to notice and companion—but to an old servant who hurried to his bedside with the alacrity of a devoted family retainer.

Time and the family lawyer proved to the widow the appalling nature of her loss. Ousted from her place among her husband's people, she cried the blue from her eyes and the bewitching curve from her cheeks and, thus handicapped, she made wild efforts to reinstate her fortunes by marriage. But her self-estimate was so ludicrously out of proportion to the general one, and her beauty waned so much more rapidly than did her ambition, that there was

but little hope of a happy compromise.

And always before her eyes there loomed the hateful necessity of launching upon the world this little daughter growing day by day into more assertive beauty. To dress Griselda suitably was bad enough, but to stand beside Griselda suitably dressed would be purgatory; and her only chance of escape lay in disposing of the girl straight from her schoolroom to some man rich enough to provide a home but not rich enough to offer a fine London setting.

And in Harry Dorset she had seen the very champion

for this complicated cause and had tracked him and his unsuspected market-value to this luxurious country house, for Mrs. Fawcett was not, so it chanced, in a position to refuse her cool suggestion of a visit. She was herself engaged in intrigue and was anxious to marry her grand-daughter to Lady Southern's nephew Peter, who, owing to the early deaths of his uncle and his father, was now in a position of some social importance.

Dorset was often to be found filling an unimportant place in an important, or at least a comfortable, house, and it was little short of maddening to watch his decidedly marked advances treated by Griselda with uncompromising and

fatal brusquerie.

And yet the mother was afraid to speak. This child was such an unknown quantity-mysterious as the husband whose reserve she had never attempted to penetrate; but now, with the case at desperation point, nothing further could be lost by reticence, and something might, at this eleventh hour, be gained. Furtively she eyed the enemy, noting the advent of a certain intensity of feeling, for across the young mind a memory was passing likewise—the memory of many lilac-scented notes-her mother's weekly communications with her when at school, and she was recalling a nauseous breath of suspicion too disagreeable to be consciously entertained; invariably she had set her window wide at such moments to the shouts of her playfellows or the clean and pungent smell of the pines below it. "Mama was a bit of a crank" was all the summing-up she had till now allowed herself. She was a Venner-poor thing-not a Southern like herself and the fastidious men and women in the Long Gallery "at home"—for The Court was always "home" in the privacy of Griselda's thoughts-but to-night it looked as though mama and her peculiarities were not to be disposed of thus carelessly.

"I've never quite made plain to you, dearest, the nature

of our position."

"Oh, must you?"

"You're forcing me to, Griselda. I have tried so hard to

spare you some of the ugly details that have shaped me into a person you can not but despise."

"Despise? No, no."

"You needn't blush and shake your head; leaving you in ignorance it was inevitable. Wait," she added, with growing emphasis, "till the shame of a false position has bitten as deeply into you—but, no, you shall do no such thing; you've had a chance and you've let it slip, but—it isn't quite out of reach yet."

"I don't understand."

"Yes, you do. You're by no means stupid, but you're

lazy, or else you're afraid."

- Afraid! I'm afraid of nothing. But—aren't you asking me to do something mean? To take him away from, from—"
- "When two people love one another," Lady Southern interrupted, "we stand aside, but these two do not; Alva is indifferent; Dorset is piqued; and—you don't dislike him, do you?"

"No-I like him, but-what's the good?-he doesn't look

at me any more."

"That's easily remedied. There are many different ways of calling people's attention," went on the wise woman, warming to her work, "but I think—no, I'm sure—my emerald necklace will be the best one—"

"Your emerald necklace?"

"You shall wear it, dear, to-night with your white muslin frock, and in ten minutes you won't have to complain of inattention. Every woman in the room will have something disagreeable to say of you or me or the stones themselves, and, of course, every man will take up the cudgels for you."

"Won't that be out of pity?"

"No, the pity comes later when you've lost your complexion; when you've grown to my pattern. But never mind that story now; we're going to write you a happier one."

She left her seat before the fire and led the way to the dressing-table, and presently the two dark heads, so alike in contour, were bending over the shabby case in which lay

the remnants of Bertha Southern's glory. The emeralds were a modern ornament; the seven large central stones composing it were wreathed in narrow frames of diamonds of a French floral pattern, intricate and graceful, and they were connected by a multitude of slender chains, alternate green and white.

As the young girl looked at it her eyes too began to sparkle and her next protest was offered with a considerable diminution of vehemence.

"It's nonsense, mama, he won't look at it; he prides himself—I'm sure he does—on his indifference to decoration."

"And I thought you prided yourself on your drammac talents."

"What does that mean?"

"That you complained just now because I took you away from school, from your mimic stage; well, don't you understand that I offer you instead a real stage and a chief rôle on it? Don't you understand that there's a drama of real life downstairs only waiting to be played and that nobody has the courage or the skill to set it going? Why not tamper with this interesting and halting situation instead of twiddling your thumbs and sulking all day? Why not alter and adjust? Why not dole out the parts and set those stupid people—as you rightly called them—into motion—into desirable motion? You've pluck, Griselda; you've a glib tongue and any amount of vitality. Turn it on like a current of electricity and watch the effect. I tell you it will be startling."

Griselda was beginning to breathe quickly—to creep hesitatingly towards the spot her mother indicated—to find there various lovers of her childhood. Too inexperienced to question very minutely the legal value of this invitation, she allowed certain encouraging ideas to penetrate her hesitation. He had looked at her first; it was her childish and persistent pout that had driven him to notice her rival; and suppose her mother were right—suppose Alva were only a picture after all, suppose it lay in her power to move that

picture—to turn it with its face to the wall and its foolish canvas back towards the eye of the foolish devotee! And softly, seductively, the voice went on, striking each fascinating note of this new and intoxicating tune with masterly ingenuity. "That poor girl has no power and no will to direct events. There she sits with her eternal and rather meaningless smile waiting for destiny to pour its treasures into her lap. Destiny will pour nothing into ours if we wait till Doomsday-but destiny has given you faculties, my dear, that make you independent. Is there no enchantment in the knowledge? If I were you I should be ashamed to waste the few short years of power with which we women—some of us, that is—are endowed." Eagerly she looked at Griselda and eagerly Griselda looked upon the vista opening out. Beside the natural impulse to violence of expression there was in her breast an unavowed but decided preference for this very man towards whom circumstance and her mother were urging her. Scarcely had he turned his back when her fancy began to flutter about him-to find in his looks and manners-even in his unwarrantable air of subdued selfimportance—a charm she did not attempt to analyze very closely. She only knew that behind an incentive to laughter there lay an incentive to pity—to championship; vaguely she read into his stiff yet graceful bearing a quarrel with fortune—the defiance of a man at odds with his destiny. She looked from the necklace to her mother's tense face, and her own broke up into an adorable smile.

"I'll do it; yes, I will. I'll stir them all up out of their sleep; anything's better than this lethargy. They took my house," she added, with increasing animation, "but they left the soldier blood, and we'll spill a little, just to test the color; a wrong behind and a house and a horse in front; oh, the fun of it!-oh, the relief to have something to do, even

if it's only making a fool of oneself."

Her face and figure seemed to radiate optimism, and Lady Southern, regarding her, felt a thrill half jealous, half ecstatic. Alva's beauty paled before the vision of this fullblooded, gay-witted conspirator, and the point so lately

regarded with desperation swam into sudden and clear view. Griselda would cut the chains of circumstance by sheer force of childish will; she would win by dint of that irresistible quality that sparkles without cause and achieves without comprehension.

"You won't let your spirits run away with you, darling," she put in, however, a faint pick of anxiety crossing her satisfaction, but Griselda, it seemed, would make no more

promises.

"That remains to be seen," she said, with unmistakable gusto. "You've started the car, and it may get to its destination or it may not; it may run over somebody or upset something; it may injure one passenger, or two, or three, or the whole lot of us; it may do nothing but take a little harmless, insignificant pleasure trip, but—for good or for evil—it's off."

CHAPTER II

TABLE TALK

But an hour later, seated beside the very person on whom she had such audacious designs, she found herself unable to begin the attack. So aggressive was the angle of the broad shoulder that he turned on her, for the time she had to content herself with taking rather contemptuous stock of the rest of the company.

There were but ten persons at Mrs. Fawcett's round table, and the most imposing in appearance was the man on her left, a Mr. Dolman-Connie, M.P., who said nothing in the House and precious little out of it, but whose magnificent aspect of suppressed intelligence was a never-ending source

of delight to his hostess.

Lady Southern was plainly not in her element, and only her hopes for her daughter's settlement added to the dim possibility of making an impression on a youth of the name of Hareton reconciled her to it. Hareton was an habitué of the house; he was wealthy, mindless, and strove to redeem "the atrocious crime of being a young man" by attaching himself to the most elderly coquette within reach. The party was further augmented—one could not say enlivened-by the presence of an ex-Colonel of Artillery-Cope by name—remarkable for the possession of a strident voice—an argumentative temper, and a wife endowed with that spirit of unquestioning loyalty that made of the Middle Ages so comfortable a berth for masculine autocracy. was to this ingenuous and confiding person that Dorset lent his ear, though it was plain his eye lingered on a younger and much fairer face. Alva Dane was a blonde to the point where insipidity might be said to war with fascination, but it was a foregone conclusion that the latter would eventually triumph, save in a prejudiced mind. For the hair was a pure, warm yellow, parted simply and knotted in the nape of the long neck, and the rather too light brows and lashes were set about a pair of eyes so brown and luminous that an adventurer, once embarking on the question of their meaning, would be compelled before long to forget all except the desire to reach the central mystery of them; her nose was aquiline, her ear delicately formed and delicately placed; her head was a trifle small for her length of limb, but so fashioned as to suggest a piece of statuary with all the rigor taken out of it by the expression of the lips; these were full and always slightly parted, and it was as though they said to all who came within the circle where the girl sat so passively: "I am indefinite-imprisoned; classify me-or better-wake me." She seemed to embody memories evoked by many a painter-poet; to have been seen in moments of mental exaltation floating down, far-eyed and captive, to Camelot or some such fairy city of the imagination. "Was the creature so absent-minded as she appeared? Was Dorset as much the master of his admiration as he affected to be? Was Peter bold enough to take what the old grandmother so obviously offered to him?" Lady Southern shook herself free from these engrossing speculations to take perfunctory part in the table talk-which, as usual, in this particular house, was improving or didactic rather than exhilarating.

Mrs. Fawcett was accustomed to offer with her excellent soup some topic of historical, political, or literary importance, and at this moment she was bemoaning in a platform

style of oratory the flippancy of the modern novel.

"We are not being catered for," she complained, "we—the intelligent—are in a minority, and it is high time we

spoke up; we must call for the life-buoy."

She looked at Mr. Dolman-Connie, but his call was for sherry, and she had to content herself with the pompous agreement of Colonel Cope, who took advantage of the occasion to embark on the recital of his own early struggles with the ignorance and obstinacy of his age. At intervals he

called upon his wife for dates with which to punctuate this personal discourse, and instead of resenting these constant interruptions of her own more domestic disclosures to the absent Dorset she always embarked eagerly upon the desired calculation with the help of all her fingers and most of her forks. Lady Southern's attention digressed once more, but returned to find the Colonel attempting a delineation of genius. Under pressure he was persuaded to admit a something elusive and unclassable in this commodity.

"All great forces," said Mr. Dolman-Connie so unexpectedly that everybody jumped, "are elusive and unclass-

able."

He placed the tips of his fingers together and closed his eyes; it was precisely as though he added: "I am elusive and unclassable; you want a figure for this argument—look at me."

"Nonsense," Colonel Cope put in roughly. He detested the member of Parliament as a poacher on the attention he wanted for himself. "All great forces express themselves bluntly and simply. I never yet came across a thing worth talking about that wasn't as plain as the nose on my face."

The simile was so effective that for the moment it silenced all. Then Mrs. Fawcett deemed it time to reassert herself, time to draw these somewhat hostile threads of conversation into the pattern demanded of the ingenuity of the leader of

a salon.

"Let us say," she began unctuously, "that you are all right, for surely genius is elusive, unclassable, simple, direct, and a great deal more besides; surely it is the essence of all fine qualities of the mind—a drop from this, a drop from that, and the whole compressed into a cup so small and so fragile that few hands are enabled to touch it. Can any one name a genuine attribute of the intellect that does not contribute its quota to the magnetic whole?"

Certain people thought they could, and voices rose almost

simultaneously.

"Affection," said Lady Southern.

"Common-sense," said the Colonel.

"Admiration for others," suggested his wife, with quite

unconscious irony.

"Logic," said Hareton, with the air of a man who has found the final word to an argument, while Dolman-Connie smiled his vast and inscrutable smile, in happy oblivion that nobody was drawing inspiration from it.

"What did you say, Miss Dane?"

Alva raised startled eyes to her questioner.

"I didn't say anything, Mr. Dorset."

"But you've been thinking. Can't you find a superior

quality of the mind that stands clear of genius?"

"There's imagination," she said with reluctance; then, fired, it seemed, into defiance by the chorus of protest her

suggestion had invoked, she went on boldly:

"Of course, I know everybody puts them together, but they don't belong. Genius is a great, ungainly power struggling to unite spirit and matter, while imagination is a bird with gorgeous wings, flying gaily into the sun. The genius is always looking up at it—that's why his eye is so bright, but he can't follow it, can't ever catch it; how could he, with that colossal weight of earthly interest and responsibility attached to him? The bird must be quite free—he must care for nothing—nothing—" By chance she caught her grandmother's eye, and broke off hurriedly, turning to the baronet beside her with an air of apology—" They shouldn't ask such questions at a dinner-table. It wasn't my fault, was it?"

He laughed, and reassured her, grateful for her abrupt change of manner, and Dorset turned once more to Mrs. Cope.

Griselda, aware that she must challenge his attention in a minute or two at latest, took a last rather nervous look at

his averted head.

The hair was sleek and dark, and very neatly parted down the middle; the face was square and closely shaven. It had, indubitably, been designed to express a buoyant and impulsive temperament, though, as indubitably, it belonged to one at mental odds with these characteristics. Fresh in color, with features pleasantly proportioned rather than distinguished, and eyes gray or green (as the light or the mood dictated) and singularly bright and wide open, the young man had his work cut out to counteract the general effect of boyish and ingenuous charm. His frame was long and wiry, and also suggestive of impulsive movement. He could but temper these impressions by moving and speaking with great deliberation. He narrowed the wide glance, and set a pince-nez on the nose whose very slight tilt upward was the special bane of his existence. His eyesight was so excellent as to be irritated by even the minute quantity of magnifying power in the glass, and, by degrees, he lessened his dependence on this particular bulwark to dignity, and only put it on in moments of emergency.

When he smiled, showing white and rather small teeth, he lost, perforce, this facial control, and there was something almost startling in the sudden exhibition of the face behind the mask—to women, at all events, and the elder and bolder of them had been known to angle for it, though, almost invariably, their success would end in arousing his suspicion, and he would avenge his vanity by refusing to have any

further dealings with them.

"He's artificial," said Griselda to herself, and, as if attracted by the intensity of her interest, he turned abruptly to face it.

"She's awake, by all that's entertaining," he remarked with unusual cordiality.

"Don't you think it was time to wake, Mr. Dorset?"

"High time, Miss Southern. When the poet raves of the glory of a pout, one feels sure he hasn't been exposed to many."

"I had so much to vex me," she explained sweetly. "Go back ever and ever so far, to your schooldays—to the last

term."

"Was it different from the others?" he asked carelessly.

"Of course it was different. You get your stamp of suc-

cess or failure."

"I needn't ask which they gave you," he said ponder-

ously.

"I never got a stamp at all—at least, it came on a letter, telling me to come here "-infinite scorn flashed across the table, away from his own face, he observed with inward satisfaction-"here-among all these-these-well, you know what they are, and-I was expected to make myself pleasant."

"You didn't do it," he reminded her consolingly.
"No more I did. What did you think of me that first night?"

"I thought you quite remarkably pretty."

"And the next night?" she ventured.

"The next night? Let me see: still pretty, but rather shy, and-forgive the mistake-rather stupid."

"And the third night?" Griselda persisted, with the cour-

age of despair.

"The third night," he echoed, with an affectation of considering the matter—" were you still there, Miss Southern?"

Her sense of humor triumphed over that of pique, and

she laughed whole-heartedly.

"I suppose you're making fun of me again. I don't care, though. We're all young and greedy some time or other in our lives, and cross, too."

"Well, you're not cross just now," he said cheerfully. "This is the first really amiable look you've given me. Why does it come so late, or why does it come at all?"

The gaiety went out of her face, and she dropped her

voice and her eyelids.

"I've only just found out that we ought to be friends, that we're in the same box—and oh! it's such a horrid box, isn't it?"

She looked up again, under cover of a petulant frown, to face his astonishment.

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, it's one of the forbidden topics," she said airily— "I know that; but I'm frightened of it, and when you talk about a monster it doesn't look quite so big."

"Would you mind being a little more explicit?" he said

coldly.

"But you must understand without making me put the hateful story into so many words. The horrid box is poverty, of course. I wish it wasn't. There are so many other disagreeable things in the world I could bear better. Why do you look so astonished? You told me how poor you were that first night, and I said, so was I; and we laughed as if it was rather a good joke—only, even then, I had the impression that your laugh didn't ring true. Now I understand the reason."

Her eyes had lost all trace of roguery, and the young face had become the toy of tragic destiny: it was a very beautiful toy, he paused to note, before voicing his disapproval of her lack of reserve.

"As you've gone so far, you'd better finish. What have

you learnt of the wry quality of the joke?"

She frowned again, but now apparently in reminiscence, in the effort to express some carefully conned, but difficult, lesson; and no manner could have befooled her listener better, for he had already his own obstinate estimate of

Lady Southern and her type.

"I've learnt that it doesn't only mean going without

things—it doesn't mean just shabby frocks; it means pretending and deceiving, and trying to keep pace with people ten times as rich as yourself; it means being polite to the nouveaux riches and cringing to your dressmaker—and oh, a great deal more that I'd like to forget."

"That you'd be wise to forget," he commented; but she

only opened her now mournful eyes a little wider.

"I've been allowed to forget for eighteen years, and now I've got to set to work and remember."

"And I'm in this same sordid box?" he inquired.

"Oh, no; I didn't mean just the same. A man can be poor without disgrace."

"I wonder why?"

"So do I," said Griselda promptly. "It doesn't seem fair, does it, to make things harder for a girl? But there

it is! A man goes out into the world and fights for what the gods won't give him. It's tiresome, of course, and takes time, but in the end he gets his freedom, if he's strong enough. But a girl has to sit indoors and look nice, and wait to be rescued or left to drown."

"I think, Miss Southern, that some one has been exag-

gerating."

"You mean my mother, don't you?" she said, so simply as to disconcert him.

"No—yes—well, I can't help feeling that she sees matters too much from a single standpoint—a bitter one. She's had rough luck, but it doesn't follow that you'll have the same."

"Of course not; that's what she says. I'm to escape, and there's only one way for a girl; and marriage isn't so bad, she says, as one imagines; only—only "—and her animation dropped with dramatic effect—"I've such strong likes and dislikes. Still it's no good; I can't be fastidious; it's anybody with a home to give me. But I'll tell you a secret: I'm going to draw one line of my own."

"I'm thankful to hear it," he said dryly.

"Yes; if he hasn't got a horse for me to ride, I shall say 'No.' It isn't much to ask, now, is it? I can't live without a horse; I don't mind about food or frocks or London seasons, or anything, in fact, but the stable."

She paused, gazing incidentally (he decided) into his face, and actually into the face of the pitiful situation, and he found himself speaking more gently than he had in-

tended.

"So that's the only line you draw? What about a fellow like Hareton?"

"Oh, I couldn't," she began, and stopped; "but—yes—I'd have to." Then an invigorating thought came to the succor of the situation and she actually laughed. "It won't be Hareton—he doesn't like anybody under forty; it will be somebody nice. Why, he *must* be a good sort to choose such a beggar-maid. I'm like Brünhilde—my poverty shuts me behind a wall of fire; he mayn't be a hero, but he must be a very disinterested man to come to the rescue."

Dorset laughed with mingled relief and amusement. This profane creature appealed to his love of power. She made, moreover, too lovely a martyr to evade his discriminating eyes; the marvelous necklace sparkling about her throat seemed to his fancy the outward symbol of that incongruity she had been unconsciously revealing. It was the lip, he told himself, quoting, parrot-fashion, the ugly tale of moral decay; the heart was still the heart of a child indissolubly linked to trust and gaiety.

"There's Mr. Dolman-Connie," he said lightly; "he's old enough to want a young wife and silent enough to want a

chatter-box."

"It would take weeks to get in touch with him," she complained with mock seriousness; "and there's nobody else here; except my cousin Peter."

Harry allowed his attention to be lured into the desired

direction, but he made no response.

"Fancy keeping an old lady like Mrs. Fawcett waiting all this time," the girl ventured cautiously; "though it isn't Peter's fault. He's dying to propose, but she can't make up her mind to let him. She doesn't want to marry anybody; in fact, she's married already to her imagination: she let that cat out of the bag to-night at dinner, didn't she?"

"Did she?" he replied laconically, but Griselda went on

in apparent disregard of his lack of response.

"Of course, she'll take him in the end. She doesn't care enough to make a stand. I think Peter will suit her very well; he's such a good kind sort, and he's handsome toodon't you think so?"

Thus directly appealed to, Harry answered that he hadn't

given the matter any consideration.

"Well, give it some now," she persisted childishly; "I want to know how he strikes another man."

"He isn't the striking sort."

"Then what sort is he?"

"What you said just now—a good sort," he admitted, driven into a corner: "good features, since you insist upon

my looking at them, good manners, a good rider, and a good shot."

"Add a good temper, and I don't see what else she can want," Griselda summarized; "and he's a brown Southern, not a yellow one, which is just as well, seeing that people are supposed to be attracted by their opposites."

"You're brown too," he said, hailing a possible diversion

of theme; "at least, there's a gipsy effect."

"And you're far too dark to appreciate it," she pouted; "you ought to fall in love with Alva—that is—I mean—oh, don't say I've put my foot in it!"

Harry smiled, with what he trusted looked like amuse-

ment.

"Have I been admiring her too obviously?" he asked, and she showed both contrition and embarrassment.

"You do look at her a good deal, but so do we all. Still, just for a moment, the awful idea came into my head that perhaps you really cared."

"And the awful idea has decamped, eh?"

She laughed a delightful reassurance to his imperiled dignity.

"Well, of course, you couldn't have taken it so easily—my slip—if you'd been serious, and besides, there hasn't

been time for a man like you to fall in love."

"How long does it take to fall from a height?" he inquired benevolently, and again she laughed, this time with an enchanting air of wisdom.

"You aren't the sort to fall; you like to do everything

with deliberation."

- "So you've been staring at me while I stared at beautiful Miss Dane."
- "I was so dull," she pleaded, "I'd nobody to talk to. It was my own fault for being cross when you were ready to be kind, but that doesn't make the loneliness easier to bear."
- "Suppose you ride with me to-morrow; I've seen you on that mare of your cousin's. Could you borrow her again?"

"Yes, I think so. Alva doesn't care much for riding;

she likes dawdling through the woods better. Would ten o'clock suit?"

"I think so, but we'll fix the time at breakfast. I may have letters to answer in the morning. What are you groping for?"

"My handkerchief and my gloves, and—if you could—my slipper. I always forget it till the signal goes; thank

you and good-by."

She was gone, but she left an impression behind. Over his walnuts he found the image of Alva blurred by another and a more vital, if a less harmonious, one; for it inflamed his pity, his curiosity, and the defiance in his blood that always induced him to feign the control of emotions with which he had never seriously warred.

CHAPTER III

A LADIES' BATTLE

A Row of fine glass-houses were connected with Mrs. Fawcett's drawing-room, and Griselda lingered in the first of them.

She was aware that the girl on whom she had designs had wandered away—presumably into the fernery beyond. Alva was frankly averse to the society of other women—at all events, of such women as were generally collected under her grandmother's roof, and the old lady, seeing in this unsocial habit an opportunity that a man in love would be likely to take advantage of, had foreborne to check it. But she had forgotten to take counter-intrigue into account and was happily unaware of this second defaulter, just now engaged in screwing her courage to the point necessary to the second move in her game of the night.

As though in answer to a sudden and dangerous drop in the girl's enthusiasm, there stole presently to her ear the notes of a violin. Lady Southern was a remarkably clever performer on this difficult instrument when one took into consideration the gods who ruled her nature, and she could voice on her "Amati" many of the ideas that are supposed to emanate from the rank emotionalists. As Griselda listened the color came again to her soft round cheek—the sparkle to her eye. As though the inflammation of one sense set into revolt the sister senses, she bent right and left inhaling the scent of heliotrope and heavy-headed yellow roses, and as she passed into the ferneries she presently found herself regarding their neutrality of color with disdain.

It was pitiful, she decided, to be so toneless, so unas-

sertive, so quiescent under the dictates of tyrannous force. Why did so few dream of rebellion—so many of submission?

In sight of Alva, she paused to take stock of this unsuspecting quarry. A couple of Japanese lanterns afforded the only light, and it was just strong enough to reveal the perfection of her rival's pose, while too faint to betray that single physical deficiency with which her enemies were wont to tax her. The hint of insipidity, of too uniform a fairness, was lost in this mysterious half-light, and the invader felt, with a bound of the pulse, that climax was upon her. Nerve and spirit responded gamely to the prompter; it was a play; they were dressed for their important parts—Alva in lovely languor and complete unconsciousness, she in her glittering necklace and desperate mind.

She made an impetuous movement, her gown rustled, and the curtain was rung up just a second before she was ready

for it.

"How you made me jump!" Alva said with a smile.

"Only you never jump," Griselda objected. "And may I call you by your first name?"

"If you want to talk to me."

"I do. No, I won't sit down; I like to stand after that interminable dinner." It was a help, the young conspirator decided, to look down, from a physical point of vantage, on this antagonist, whose placidity at these close quarters seemed to conceal magnetic force. She wore an Empire gown of white satin, accentuating, by its simplicity, the faultless lines of the form beneath. Her two white hands lay in the lap of it, and, to the other, they suggested the hands of fate, waiting in patient strength the signal for movement. The silence appeared to her fancy to be Alva's friend, and she hastened to expel it, convinced that in quick by-play, in litheness, in impulsive attack lay her own chance of triumph.

"I can't think how I ever dared to come," she began, but curiosity urges one to do the most outrageous things,

and I'm devoured with curiosity."

"About me, Griselda?"

"Of course. You're so different from the rest of us. You look at us so strangely and from such a long, long way off. Your eyes are full of fairy tales, and I can read the beginnings of them but never the ends. I suppose there's the conquering prince and joy for ever after, but I'm not sure. For one thing, you wouldn't be satisfied with our sort of prince or our sort of joy either, would you?"

Alva smiled again, not displeased with this tribute to her

peculiarities.

"I thought you were a schoolgirl," she said graciously, "and it would be no use trying to talk to you. I wonder what brought you here to-night?"

"It was what you said at dinner," Griselda replied treacherously; "I want to hear some more about the bird

that flies into the sun."

But Alva flushed with annoyance.

"I was an idiot to say such things to such a set of people. I forgot where I was, and—and—I was a little desperate tonight. I'm glad you came, Griselda. I wanted somebody to speak to, and you're so safe and so kind," she finished, with a look the other could not meet.

"I'm interested," she answered, looking at the silver line of water running from the trellised roof by rocky degrees into the carved basin of stone at Alva's back. "I want to follow those long thoughts of yours that take you so far away from all the rest of us."

"But they don't take me, that's the trouble. They always used to, until a few days ago, and now—now—for some unknown and detestable reason—they won't fly; they're

running round in a circle, like mice in a trap."

The spirit of enterprise found encouragement in this chance simile.

"Mice in a trap," Griselda echoed; "but have you seen the trap?" Alva stared, and her friend proceeded quickly, fearful of interruption: "Have you ever been to The Court? because that's the only trap in which anybody wants to cage you." For a moment the elder girl wavered between indignation and curiosity, then the latter triumphed.

"Southern Court? I've been there, years ago, when I

was a child."

"And what do you remember?"

"The pictures," said Alva softly, "and a marble woman with her head upon her hand, and a rose-garden with a sun-dial in the middle of it; but these things are in every place of the sort," she finished, with an effort to recapture some defiance.

"If you go again," said her companion solemnly, "you won't come back!"

"That's nonsense. It's a beautiful house, full of sweet memories, but a child is easily taken in by effect."

Griselda shook her head.

"It gets worse as you grow older. They tell you more and more, those queer dead men and women in the gallery; they won't go to sleep; they can't forget that it all belonged to them and they to it. If you stand very still on a moonlight night, they begin to smile and sigh and shake the tapestry. Sometimes there's the swish of silk skirts, and if you follow it you always go the same way: out of the gallery by the north door, down the big corridor, and on into the little one to your right, through the old bridal chamber, where mother wouldn't sleep, and out by the door behind the curtain on to the winding wooden staircase that goes up—up to the play-room under the roof."

"It's echo," said Alva faintly, her great brown eyes beginning to glitter strangely in the uncertain light; "it's creaking boards and mice and shadows formed by the movement of the moon." But she was begging for contradiction, and Griselda took up her theme, grateful for the influx of

genuine sensation invading her pulses.

"It's the shadows of people who lived and loved so fiercely that they can't pass on. Do you think I don't understand their feeling? I've been turned out, but I'm one of them. They are my own people, and they whisper to me, not very kindly sometimes—they're bitter, you know;

they like to rub in the glorious 'might-have-been'; it relieves their own sense of loss to gloat over mine; it amuses them to sneer at their own flesh and blood, to laugh at these confounded—I beg your pardon—these fatal petticoats. I'm crossed out, and I ought to have been in the middle; I ought to have been where Peter is, and look at me—a wretched little female beggar tricked out in a borrowed necklace, forced to whine at every street corner for alms from the independent."

There were tears of real chagrin in her eyes as she finished.

"Poor Griselda! it's a shame, but what can I do? It's the law, and it has tormented thousands besides you; and then—then—you're so sweet to look at—somebody will play champion; somebody will take pity; chance will turn the wheel again, I'm sure."

"I don't trust chance, Alva. I want a human finger on

the wheel. I want this finger."

Lightly she put out her hand and laid it on one of Alva's. "My helpless little finger?" said the girl in bewilder-

ment.

"It's only helpless because you can't be bothered to move it. You must wake up, Alva Dane"—and now there was genuine passion in the inciting voice, for the great game was beginning to assume royal possibilities—"you're on the rocks and there are more lives on board than you imagine. First there's Peter: he would make a bonfire of his ancestor's portraits to give you an hour's amusement, and you're tormenting him; then there's your poor old grandmother" (a dangerous desire to laugh at this particular figure had to be rigorously checked): "she's set her heart on the match; and then—and then—there's Mr. Dorset and me." Her tongue faltered effectively, and her voice changed quality.

"You-Griselda? What in the world has it all got to do

with you?"

"Oh, that's so like you star-gazers," said the girl pettishly; "you never see the tiny earth-creatures you step on whenever you make one of your rare movements. As you said before, I'm a schoolgirl—I ought not to have sensibilities and fancies; but I have, and they're just as important to my happiness as your great winged thoughts are to yours."

"Go on, dear," said Alva gently.

"Yes, and I'll try to put it in your sort of language. I'm like one of the people in the fairy tales who are compelled by a malicious fairy to fall in love with the first person they meet round a certain corner. I come out of school—I turn the corner, and—and I meet him. But some impulse, as mysterious as it is dangerous, urges me to defy the spell. He was kind, but, Alva, I was cross, and—he turned away to find you on the other side, and you don't really want anybody in that way, do you? You are complete by yourself; you seem to sit apart, like a great lady on a throne, and we come to you for help, for pity, for our futures."

Alva was not as indifferent to this form of flattery as she chose to pretend.

"What is it that you are asking me to do, Griselda?"

"To give him up, and at once, before the charm has been taken out of him. He's only looked at you; he hasn't spoken to you. There's still time," she finished imploringly.

"Are you in love with him?"

"Yes, against my will; by order of the mysterious company that the law doesn't countenance. He was the first, I tell you, and without much rhyme or reason we give them our hearts. I often laugh at him, Alva; he's vain and prejudiced, and almost as inexperienced as I am myself, but it makes no difference. I want him—I've got to love him."

"It's rather a fascinating idea," Alva said; "but there are dragons in the way, much bigger ones than his possible fancy for me," she added, with one of those lapses into prose that always startled her friends. "He's very poor, Griselda. Your mother will never allow you to think of him."

Griselda looked shamefully into the green depths of the fernery and as usual she found before long a stimulating

thought: it was better, she told herself firmly, to win an ignoble game than to lose it, and she turned once more to face her quiet companion.

"No. It would mean years of waiting, but-but aren't

there some things that are worth waiting for?"

Alva answered promptly to this falsely heroic spur. She put out a hand, little used to impulsive gestures, and pressed

the one Griselda resigned to her.

"Of course there are. I try to talk that way sometimes to please granny, but it's an affectation. I belong heart and soul to that mysterious company the law refutes. They haven't told me to fall in love with a particular person, though I'm years older than you, and I begin to be afraid

they never will."

"And you'll marry Peter," said her friend softly; "he'll take you to The Court and put you among all those lovely women of the past. You said you were just beginning to be unhappy: that's because you're in the wrong place. You don't belong to Mrs. Fawcett and her set. You belong to wide spaces and pale spirits, not to this comfortable modern house. Peter will be good to you; he's good to everybody. He won't ask you for what you can't give. He won't spoil the mystery in you. You'll take him to-night, Alva, won't you? I'll send him here, and you'll let him speak at last and make us all happy."

"He'll be good to me," said Alva dreamily; "he'll take me to that old house, and everybody will be pleased. I suppose I ought to say 'Yes.' I've been trying to say it for some time, and—and—you're so sure it's the right word,

aren't you?"

"Of course; but how am I ever going to thank you?"

Griselda said diffidently.

"By taking advantage of my sacrifice—if it is a sacrifice," Alva began in a voice that demanded reassurance on this

point.

"It's the greatest sacrifice a woman ever makes," Griselda declared, not without an inner sense of guilt. "I couldn't have asked it of anybody else. A lover is the one thing no

ordinary girl will give up, however little she may return his passion. And you don't love him, do you? You don't really want him at your feet? Say it, just to set my mind at rest before I go and coax him to make friends with me again."

Alva laughed. "No; I don't want anybody at my feet. Take him if you can, and your mother will let you, with an easy conscience. And—yes—you may send Peter. When I've said 'Yes' they'll leave me alone, and I shall be free to think my old thoughts. Oh, Griselda, do you care as much as all this?" for the girl was pressing hot kisses against her hair. "It makes me a trifle jealous; I seem to be missing something. But—perhaps—some day I shall take fire too; only—only I shall be tied down; it will be too late."

For a moment her placidity rocked, and Griselda hastened

to steady it.

"You don't belong to people," she said reassuringly. "When you fire up it will be to light a city or an empire, not a man's hearth."

She left the flattery to do its work and fled rapidly back the way she had come, hoping to be in time to intercept her cousin on his way to the drawing-room, and not unwisely, for no last word could have appealed more forcibly to Alva Dane than the one she had chosen. It was delightful to play the almoner of fortune in this non-exacting fashion, and she sat in patient self-satisfaction waiting to admit a favored courtier—not to the inner chamber of sensation, but only to the outer one of personal environment; and she little suspected that it was an inflamed instinct and not a quixotic mind that dominated the point at stake and minimized its significance in such reassuring fashion.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMEDY OF PROTECTION

To the two men she intercepted so opportunely together on their way to the drawing-room, Griselda stood at first for no more than a pretty and breathless image of embarrassment.

"You look," said her cousin, "as though you had been in mischief."

"Is there a fire somewhere?" Dorset inquired with flip-

pancy.

"No; there's no fire and no mischief, but—I was to tell you—I was to ask you—that is, there's something—waiting for you, Peter, in the last of the ferneries."

Peter looked mystified, but to Dorset came an antici-

patory flash of comprehension.

"Is it animal, vegetable, or mineral?" he asked, with a creditable air of amusement. But Griselda kept her eyes steadily upon her cousin.

"It is Alva," she said simply, "and I promised to send

you."

Peter started, looked keenly at this Queen's-messenger, then, without any comment, he made for the door by which Griselda had come, and passed quickly through it to find his fate.

"How did you get into the problem?"

Dorset's tone was just a trifle too careless to effect its purpose, and the courage, which for a moment threatened to desert her, came flowing back.

"She was sitting all alone, and she wanted somebody to talk to. I can admire her and sympathize with her, though I can't understand her. She wants to be human now and then, Mr. Dorset. But it isn't easy for her; she doesn't belong to our common ideas and habits."

"Still, I gather she meditates a very practical descent into

them," he commented shortly.

"Yes. She's been explaining it to me. You see, she can't give her real self to anybody; she'd like to, but she can't."

"And the spirit being unbindable, she offers the inconsequent flesh," the young man said, but only to himself. Aloud, he remarked that "if Southern were satisfied, it was not for less favored mortals to cavil at the lady's distinctions."

She let a degree of anxiety animate her face. "You don't mind, do you? Now and then I've thought—I've fancied—that—well—she's so lovely—and you do look at her a good deal—but it's nonsense, isn't it?" she finished, with a childish accent of appeal.

"Nonsense to regard me as an unsuccessful wooer?" he

suggested.

"Oh, I don't understand you any better than Alva," she said mendaciously. "You both bewilder me, but not in the same way. I can only see that you don't seem to belong to one another any more than—than you belong to me."

This attitude was both flattering and reassuring, and it left the vaunted master of his emotions well disposed to play a

short comedy of protection.

"Must we face the music?" he said, with a confidential lift of his shoulder in the direction of the drawing-room, where Mrs. Cope could be heard struggling with the accompaniment to "The Devout Lover," sung nightly by Mr. Hareton at his hostess's request.

"There's the back drawing-room," she whispered eagerly; it has a curtain drawn right across, and we shan't get the

full force of his top note."

Like a pair of conspirators they stole, by a roundabout route, to this semi-seclusion. The room was only dimly lighted, and it suited alike the irritated mood of the man and the adventurous resolution of the girl. "It's nice here, isn't it?" she began, when she had established herself and him at the far end of it. "I like that dull red lamp and the stillness, and I almost like 'The Devout Lover' at this distance. I don't want to get up and go back; what a pity one can't choose a particular moment, and say—and say—"

"Verweile doch-du bist so schön. It has been done,

Miss Southern, but not with success."

"I'm afraid I don't understand. I never got very far with my German—it is German, isn't it? There were such a lot of ends to the adjectives and sexes to the nouns. War was a gentleman—that's right enough; but love was a lady, and a horse was neither the one nor the other—I should have made him a king, if they'd consulted me. They might, at least, have given him a soul, because a heaven without a horse in it wouldn't be any fun at all."

"What is a soul?" he asked, more for the artistic pleasure of watching her fancies inflame her childish face than for any expectation of receiving an illuminative an-

swer.

"A soul? Why, a soul is something that goes on for ever and ever."

"That's a quantity," he protested lazily, "not a quality."

"And you don't care," she retorted, with a flash of shrewdness. "You want me to talk you to sleep after your good dinner, but I'm not a musical-box. I object to being treated so unfairly."

"But I'm really curious," he roused himself to insist; "is there a soul in this country house?—in Dolman-Connie, for

instance—or in Hareton—or in you and me?"

"As if you didn't know a thousand times more than I do about the soul. Of course they are here, in each of us, but they don't look out of windows. There isn't room, with such a multitude of trivial aims and interests about. Look into my eyes; they don't tell you anything important, now, do they? They are panes of empty glass, colored by chance or by an ancestress with a particular affection for a particular shade of blue."

He accepted the invitation, aware that in doing so he was also accepting a certain risk; aware that his mood of the evening was not normal, unless (and here came a yet sharper point to suspicion) this influx of speculative emotion was the normal, and his old attitude the affected, state of manhood. In any case, it behooved him to be cautious. Alva's decision had touched his vanity on the raw, and this mobile face, lent so suddenly, so unreservedly, to his attention, had always pleased his eye. The qualified gipsy charm began, for the second time, to assert an influence over his imagination, all the more potently because this same imagination had been held so long and so systematically in leash. Thanks mainly to the astonishingly accommodating nature of circumstances, he had, till now, managed to keep his distance from the female eye—this quality of female eye, at all events. Leaning forward, against his judgment, almost against his will, it now seemed to him that a startling amount of light was emitted from it, and that there was rising in him an inexplicable but hungry demand for light. There was something at once innocent and all-wise, buoyant and imploring, in those limpid depths he strove to fathom; and, as he yielded, now a prejudice, now a conviction, it seemed to his unusually sensitive fancy that she too yielded, as reluctantly, but just as unquestionably, some constitutional tendency, thus leaving him always the master of the occasion.

"I can't believe them empty," he said cautiously, "and I don't want to believe them full of sordid interest and aims, such aims as you avowed so frankly at dinner, for example. They are very blue, Griselda—I mean, Miss Southern,—and I've never seen a blue eye at quite such close quarters before; in my family they're all gray or green, like my own. There is no warmth, no disturbing call to—to—now, where in the world is it that they're calling me to?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she answered innocently. "Do you want to be called in any particular direction? Are you a little dull sometimes? I'm never dull—at least, I never was till I came into this house. At school I used to wake

up every morning at the same time, and find a jolly little spirit beside the pillow busy mapping out the day for me. I won't say he always mapped it out very judiciously; he got me into plenty of trouble, but even trouble is better than nothing—it's a movement, anyway. You're so quiet, and yet I don't feel it's because you can't move; when you smile there comes an odd jump in my breast, as if something was going to happen, but it flashes out and back again, and you're only—only the man 'in Colonial employ' after all."

"And you've no use for him, eh?"

"He's no use for me," she complained, "or for any of us; he looks away over our heads, towards Uganda, I suppose, as Mrs. Jellaby used to look at the natives of Borrioboola-Gha. Must you go? It's so far away and so hot; I don't want you to go just as we are going to make friends."

"Find me a really good reason for throwing up my appointment," he fenced, not quite as lightly as he would have

liked.

"But I can't find a better reason than my wanting you," she said, encouraged by his expression. "When you want a thing very badly you must have it, and if it's near enough you take it."

"You'd have some difficulty in taking a point of this

kind."

"Yes," she agreed, with a disarming change of tone. He saw every vestige of the mischief drained from her face; her lip shook and her voice lost all its notes of saucy exuberance. "That's true. I keep forgetting. Mama only told me the hateful story to-night, and I haven't quite taken it in even yet. There's somebody in me that says, 'Yes, I see, I submit,' and somebody else, a sort of fairy counselor, who laughs and says, 'Don't worry, dear; I'll save you, even on the altar steps."

A passion fully half sincere gave to the utterance an un-

due amount of influence.

"The counselor is conscience," he suggested, struggling to expel the magic pressing him close, but she laughed her disdain for such a misnomer. "You can't play games with your conscience, and I've played games with my fairy friend ever since I was a baby. He doesn't care twopence for right and wrong, and I don't bother him with such tiresome questions. But I go to him whenever I'm in a difficulty, just as I used to do years ago at The Court, when I was supposed to be fast asleep in bed. 'Are you there, fairy prince?' I used to call, when the light went out and my nurse had gone safely down to her supper.

"'To be sure, Griselda,' he'd answer straight away.

"'What are we going to do to-morrow, fairy prince?'

"'I'm going to be a big bear, Griselda."

"'And who are you going to eat up, fairy prince?'

"'Everybody you don't like, Griselda'; and that's why I can't be quite desperate, for that's what he'll say the night before the wedding. I know my fairy prince, and I don't believe he'll play me false. He'll eat up the bridegroom, if he isn't to my taste, and mama, too, if she makes a fuss, and everybody who tries to hurt his dear Griselda. Think of Mr. Dolman-Connie standing up to a big bear." But Harry Dorset was thinking of something still more incongruous.

"It's all rubbish," he said sharply, still wrestling with the spirit of revolution taking each moment a more definite and a more dangerous shape. "You're dreaming, but you'll wake up to find yourself a twentieth-century wife very

firmly tied to prose."

"Well, then, it will be my fate," she said resignedly, "and I can't control fate; I can only control the temper in which I accept it. I can be cheerful, even in my prison; I can laugh, and the noise will keep the rats away, if it won't bring anybody to the rescue."

"Griselda, you're mad!"

"Hush!" she said, and turned her face away, "mother is going to play the 'Liebes-traum' by Liszt. It's beautiful! it makes you forget or remember—a little of both, perhaps. I think mama's soul is in her fingers; listen! she plays the piano almost as well as the violin."

He leant back in his seat, fancying for a moment that this interruption had been in his favor, but presently he became

aware that a new regiment had been added to the army out against his old peace of mind. It was as though the music seized upon each concession he had approached and wrought it into a definite and harmonious decision, while his vanity had to content itself with the effort to infuse into these new conditions of existence at least some of the qualities of the old. Surely there was monarchial disregard of custom in this abrupt defiance of his own code directly he had occasion to doubt its competency! Surely, too, this child looked at him as captives look from their cages, out towards the lords of liberty and the masters of their fates! Suddenly his refusal to regard the "vineyard of Naboth," even with the interest of a brother, began to rock, as he told himself that the common view (saved from vulgarity by its union with the uncommon occasion) stood behind his recantation and promised practical support. After all, strong men made sacrifices, covered with them the frailty and the misfortune of weak women. She was young to battle with sordid circumstances; she was very ignorant, and she was very trustful; she was very lovely, and she was so near him that he could note the breath fluttering in her white throat between the bars of that detestable necklace.

And as he swayed between the stolid memories of the past and the fantastic promises of the future, there came to him from behind the thick velvet curtain, this dream of love evoked by an experienced artist mind and expressed by experienced artist fingers. Each wonderful phrase surged forward and slipped back, just as did his vacillating sensations; there was hint and defiance, assertion and retraction, but the triumph of the senses was ever and always but a question of time. When the thrilling climax came, when the hesitancy was beaten down by those regal, audacious, conquering chords, Griselda turned her full face once more to him, and the ecstasy upon it gave the death-blow to his opposition, although the knowledge of the magnitude of his surrender forced him to set a temporary hedge or two between his worsted self and this inexplicable subduer.

"For you, remember, it means the first man or devil with

three acres and a cow," he said roughly; but she only laughed outright, and shook her brown head at him with a

vehemence there was no disdaining.

"You can't frighten me any more. The music has given me back my courage. It's made me forget the thorns and remember the roses. You see, it all came right in the end it had to. And it will be the same with my life. I've got to trust the spirit of fair-play, even if I can't quite trust that fairy counselor of my childhood. Besides, to look at the matter from a serious, mathematical point of view, it's at least three to one on a nice man turning up. There are ever so many more nice people in the world than nasty ones. I've been about," she added, with an adorable air of wisdom-"I know what I'm saying. Heaps of the girls used to take me home for the holidays, and oh, they were good to me! They lent me everything they had and I hadn't-their horses and their frocks and their pet brothers and cousins. I had to accept so much and give-nothing. But some day I mean to pay them back; some day when the luck turns. It wasn't only for myself I wanted that home and horse I told you about."

He bent closer, but with a frown, for he was still loth to let go the doctrines of the past; he tried to compel conviction into his accent, having already failed to compel it into

his mind.

"You've been to other houses. You were young, but you were never stupid—I'll vouch for that. Did you never see, in any of those houses, a wife held cheap?"

"Don't," she said imploringly, "don't put it that way; mama never does, and she must know if it's dangerous or

not."

"Never mind your mother's knowledge; she sees these matters merely from the social side. Think for yourself. Have you never felt a doubt or suspected a difficulty?"

Awed by his intensity, seen for the first time, she released an already weakened grasp upon mock sensation and forced her mind obediently backwards.

"I don't know; I can't remember; I won't remember. I

suppose there were unhappy marriages among them, but—it was the wife's fault, I'm sure. She had no pluck, or she

was ugly; I couldn't go under in that way."

"A few years with some of the men society tolerates would efface more beauty and more spirit than you've got," he insisted pitilessly, his vehemence addressed as much to his own weakness as to hers. "You must give it up, Griselda, this trade you've been told to drive here. It isn't safe. You must promise to give it up."

"That's a big promise to give to-to a stranger," she

said, with an access of defiance.

"I'm no stranger; I'm a friend."

But he was aware, even as he offered the platitude, that she would yield to no argument of that sort. She sat silent, looking fixedly at him, waiting, so it seemed to his now nervous imagination, for that real attack he was bound to make, in spite of reason, of habit, of all the boundary fences set by discretion and ambition.

"I'm your friend," he said again, but with an entirely new inflection, the significance of which she did not fail to

recognize. "I don't want to see you spoilt or hurt."

"You needn't look," she said.

"I try to think so, but-there's too much color; your

eyes, Griselda, your necklace-" He broke off.

She made no rejoinder, and it was again as though she waited until his caution should evacuate the position it had so vainly taken.

The music had stopped; the room was very still: only the

subdued hum of voices came from behind the curtain.

The young man decided to take his defeat with at least

an air of autocracy.

"You shall not go into that market. You don't understand it, and I do. Your fairy prince will never save you, you most sweet and most foolish little girl, but I can and will. You shall come with me; do you hear, Griselda?"

"Yes," she said automatically, for the instigating spirit had deserted her for good, and she was a doll in the hands of destiny, and destiny wore the shape of a man with queer,

gray-green eyes, full of something that was neither eagerness nor anger, but a mixture of both. Where was he going to take her, and why could she not go with the old gay spirit of adventure warm in her breast? Why did it hurt him to give, and her to take?

"I'm not rich," she heard him saying, as in some dream, but then I'm not a beast: I won't hurt you or hold you

cheap. Is it enough?"

She drew a long breath.

"It's too much," she said feebly, "I can't-I won't-I

daren't. You don't understand."

"Oh yes, I do," he reassured her. "You didn't suppose I could afford to listen to your case, but I choose to think I'm independent to that extent. You see, you can't be particular; you can't ask much. A house, a horse; I can promise these—in time."

She smiled with wet eyes, grateful for this lightening of

the atmosphere.

"Say it's a game," she begged childishly, "say you've been amusing yourself." But he would say nothing of the sort.

"I shouldn't dream of amusing myself in this fashion," he answered stiffly; then, as her eyelids fell, his amiability returned. "Can't you bring yourself to like the idea—and me?"

With an effort she produced the smile of coquetry. It was easier, she found, to give than the expression of that inner wealth of gratitude so indissolubly mixed with shame.

"I like you immensely. You've not got a beard or a bald head; you're not an ass like Mr. Hareton, or a pompous

old idiot like Mr. Dolman-Connie."

"All negative charms," he said, finding sufficient contradiction of her terms in the look she lifted to him. "You couldn't find a positive one?"

"A dozen. I like your teeth, and your slow voice, and the way you move—and your temper," she finished auda-

ciously.

"My temper? You don't mean to say I expose it?"

"No, but you let us feel it's there—an invisible force that we'd better not invoke unless we're prepared for rough weather."

He laughed, but without much animation.

"Well-if you're satisfied, Griselda"; but the words brought her a chill memory.

"Don't say that; it's what you said about Alva. Are you

quite, quite sure that it isn't her you want?"

"I've wanted her," he answered lightly, "as I've often wanted an hour of music or illusion; now I want you in a far more mundane and exacting fashion. Suppose you tell

me if, and how much, you want me?"

How much did she want him? It was not a question to be answered that night or for many nights. Already she had begun to suspect that this battle with destiny, embarked upon so flippantly, won so easily, was not what it had originally professed to be, what Lady Southern would be sure to call it. What had she taken with the triumph of the night? What could she hold? What treachery lurked in the breast of the captive she had disarmed and worsted with such astonishing speed? Had she touched his heart with that stolen key, or just a man's fancy? and how did one grasp so ephemeral a prize?

He was waiting for the answer to his question, and there were hundreds she could have given him. She could have told him that she wanted him as the Peri wanted to pass the gate of Paradise, and she could have told him that she wanted him as a common relief-officer; she could have told him that his offer had drawn for her a magic circle, in which her pulse danced like some fevered victim of the tarantula, and she could have told him that she wanted him to stand between her dainty person and the brutal, egotistical, social world; she could have told him the truth, with its mingled array of romantic fancies and coarse facts, but she knew, by an instinct she probably owed to her mother, that such facts and such fancies would be alike distasteful to him.

She understood that he had been betrayed into a rare and

an expensive impulse, and she thought to see the consciousness of a fretting pride already at work upon his serenity. He wanted reassurance much as Alva had wanted it an hour before; he wanted to be told that he had stooped of his own will to shelter an unfortunate, and that his sacrifice had been made by an intelligent and chivalrous mind, not by a common weakness of sex.

"I want you very much," she began irresolutely, "but it's all so new and surprising, and—whatever will mama have to say to it?"

This was a happy question, for it gave the young man an opening for declaring his independence of Lady Southern's

opinion.

"It doesn't matter what she says. She'll probably call it nonsense, but don't you pay any attention. My chances aren't much to boast about, but they're good enough for us. You're so young that you won't mind waiting a year or two—"

But here Griselda broke in with an exclamation of dire dismay. "A year or two! oh no! mama wouldn't hear of it."

"She'll have to," he retorted. "I'm not in the least afraid of Lady Southern, and there's no need for you to be either. I've a little money of my own, and—and I've certain prospects——" He broke off in some embarrassment, aware that he was actually considering a position from

which he had hitherto stood proudly aloof.

"Mama likes you very much," said the girl incautiously, intent only upon dispersing that sudden cloud about his eyebrows. "She won't mind your not being rich, so long as you're not quite impossibly poor; she can't expect me to make a grand marriage"—then she too stopped, in her turn conscious that a new idea had invaded the mind of her companion, and that he was looking intently, suspiciously, not so much at her as through her at some distant and quite unexpected point of view exposed by her artless remarks.

"She likes me very much," he murmured; "she doesn't

expect you to make a grand match; she lent you that necklace; she's given me many opportunities of making acquaintance with you during this last week, and—and she's a very fine performer on the piano and the violin."

"Yes," said Griselda fearfully. "But what are you

thinking about?"

He was thinking of a certain piece of information, until now regarded as irrelevant to any serious occasion, viz., that a certain sister-in-law of his and his mother-in-law-to-be had met some months before, at a momentous time; he was thinking of a main tendency in each lady, with the result that his uninterrupted evening's amusement began to as-

sume something other than a coincidal character.

"Ways and means," he said, with no very perceptible delay, and to her relief and astonishment she found an added degree of tenderness in his scrutiny. It never occurred to him, even for a moment, to include this pretty, confiding child in his sudden suspicion; instead, an added impulse of pity moved him as he saw her netted with himself in the toils of an intriguing worldling. He was convinced that, with a sagacity little short of devilish, Lady Southern would have left him an ineligible, knowing well that though she might coax her daughter's tongue into ugly expression, she would never be able to compel the frank and generous heart behind it to further her detestable cause. "I'm collecting the arguments best suited to persuade your mother that my offer is not quite as presumptuous as it sounds. Do you think I shall be a match for her, Griselda?"

"I think you would be a match for any one, if you decided to exert yourself," she told him, with a flattering air of sin-

cerity.

"You're going to trust me, then," he said, and took her soft, curved face between his hands. At the touch all the complexity, all the duplicity, all the fear and shame went out of her.

"I love you," she whispered; "I love you, Harry Dorset, truly I do. I was a child till I saw you, but I'll never be a

child again. I don't want to: it's all growing dim, the years behind."

"What!" he mocked, but with hardly restrained passion, "the fairy prince is dead? You'll go with an earth-man, you strange, sweet, reckless little Griselda? You can love all of a sudden, at a first word, at a look? It doesn't sound reasonable or very safe. I'm not sure that we're acting wisely, but—but there really isn't any other way to act, as far as I can see and feel."

His arm was about her, holding her close, his face was pressed to her own. She closed her eyes, and two tears of utter content slipped from them and down her cheek. Presently they reached his, and if anything were needed to finish the work of subjugation, they served that purpose.

Lady Southern might have chosen a happier moment for her intrusion, but she could not have chosen a more dramatic one.

The faint rattle of the curtain rings brought the young man rather hurriedly to his feet, but it was not confusion that animated his prompt greeting of her.

"I'm much obliged to you for your seductive music," he said with his customary deliberation. "I had something to say to your daughter that wanted just such an accompaniment as that you so kindly provided. In point of fact, Lady Southern, I have been making her an offer of marriage."

She met his scornful glance bravely.

"That's a very decisive action," she said calmly, "and it's much too late to discuss it to-night; besides, Mrs. Fawcett might have cause to complain of my manners, as well as yours, if we linger here any longer. Shall we say to-morrow—in the library—at—at ten o'clock?"

"That will suit me very well; and we'll have our ride after lunch," he added, turning to Griselda. "Now don't worry or imagine we are going to disagree. I'm convinced I can persuade your mother that she is not the woman of the world she professes to be; she won't deny us our cottage

and our pony and our dinner of herbs, Griselda, so don't lie awake and anticipate trouble."

"No, my dear, we won't quarrel," Lady Southern chimed in, "because we both want the same thing—your happiness; though I've no doubt we shall have to argue a little about the ingredients that go to the production of that state."

Added to Harry's irritation and animosity was a grain of reluctant admiration for her pluck in facing a difficult position. At least she sank to no expletives of astonishment or satisfaction; she convinced him of her duplicity, but she also convinced him that he had a clever woman to deal with, one who offered him, at all events, the pleasant prospect of a war of wits.

He bowed, took the curtain from her hand and drew it back politely, thus intimating that they were prepared to follow her into the adjoining room. But she lingered to send a smile in her daughter's direction.

"You are not the only deserters this evening," she said softly. "Peter and Miss Dane have also made themselves conspicuous by absence. We have whispered the answer to that riddle behind our fans, but, if I'm not much mistaken,

it is now being spoken aloud."

It was apparent she was not mistaken. The drawn curtain revealed an animated concourse of people. Peter had betrayed his tale of conquest to his hostess, and in her delight she had instantly passed it on. Alva was the center of a congratulative group; and Griselda only paused long enough to observe that her friend looked satisfied, almost happy, before she took advantage of the general excitement to effect her escape.

CHAPTER V

SOME OF THE HORRID DETAILS OF WAR

If she hoped to be left undisturbed to her ruminations she was doomed to disappointment. Her mother's rap upon the door was a summons it was impossible to ignore, but Lady Southern, coming in radiant with satisfaction and approval, found herself in a threatening atmosphere.

Griselda had discarded her muslin frock; she wore a dressing-gown of ugly gray flannel, her hair lay in thick short curls upon her neck and shoulders; in her hand she swung the emeralds and she looked at the intruder with the

air of an animal at bay.

"Oh, dear; surely you're not going to be hysterical," the mother observed plaintively, taking by instinct the only comfortable chair in the room. For answer the girl flung the necklace upon the dressing-table, where it lay winking its innumerable green eyes with sinister effect.

"Mama, I can't go on—I can't take him this way. I didn't know what I was doing. I thought it was just a joke as well as a way out of our difficulties; but it isn't, it's

something else, and I'm frightened."

"There's nothing to be frightened at, my dear. Of course we all have to take a good many queer chances along with the ring. Mine was a case of 'for worse' instead of 'for better,'" she added, giving a petulant twist to her own symbol of matrimony, "but I've every confidence that your future is to be more satisfactory."

"Alva doesn't love him—Peter, I mean," Griselda began to murmur irrelevantly, "and some day—some day,—oh, I

can't take the responsibility."

"In that case I'm afraid I must ask you to take your

share of certain other responsibilities," said the elder woman coldly. "I'm afraid it devolves on me to explain that our poverty isn't the sort that dares to go in rags; we've got to look like everybody else or be expelled, and I don't think you've grasped the sort of place that people of our class are expelled to. It's not the cottage of ivy and honeysuckle, it's not the sweet peace of independent solitude. No; seclusion and the simple life are hobbies for the wealthy. We go down to dishonor and subterfuge if we lose our place; we have to live on the success of our untiring efforts to please our independent neighbors. We live on their charity, or worse still their folly. Must I go on?"

" No, no."

"You'll be sensible?"

"If only he hadn't been so kind, so sorry for me," mur-

mured the girl as before.

"If, if," said her mother impatiently, "if things were as they should be we shouldn't need to work for a living in this way. But you must understand, once for all, that I can't give you another game for to-morrow—this mad game of retraction. You see," she added more mildly, "it wouldn't go off so pleasantly. To-night, Griselda, you were urging people in the way they all—subconsciously—wanted to go, but it would be a very different matter urging them all back again, and when it's done-when you and I are left together with our very queer reputation for practical joking -with our empty purses-our sheaves of bills-our haunting memories of brighter days-don't you think that a doubt as to the wisdom of your choice will perhaps be likely to add something to our miseries?"

"There's Aunt Mary, she's always kind."

"Kind, yes-in her scrappy-little way. It's easy enough

to be kind when you've all the luck."

"Luck, mama? Why, she lost her husband too-shot by a fanatic native in India-before ever he could get home and inherit. Poor Aunt Mary, she hasn't had much better luck than we have."

"It was unfortunate of course," the other allowed, "but

she's had The Court all these years, during Peter's minority, and now if he marries and turns her out she's got a fortune of her own to amuse her. It's dependence that cuts to the bone, Griselda. Allow me to know rather more of life than you do." But Griselda only shivered and turned her face towards the firelight.

"It was so dreadfully easy," she began once more, "so mysteriously easy. They scarcely fought at all. Alva took Peter and Harry took me just because I asked them. At the time it didn't seem so strange. I cared so much, and they seemed to care so little,—but now the play's over—

the lights are out—and I'm afraid, I'm afraid."

"To-morrow, my dear child, I shall show you some letters."

"Letters, mama?"

"Letters from dressmakers, from hotel proprietors, from carriage proprietors, from anybody and everybody who caters for the comfort of our class. From tradespeople and servants, from friends who lent you money in ignorance, or enemies who advanced it in complete understanding."

She paused, for the girl had pressed her hands to her ears; but presently, as if in sudden shame at her own cowardice, she took them away, and looked once more at the

worn beauty opposite.

Lady Southern spoke again, but with less asperity.

"I used to put my hands over my ears, but I too had to take them away again. Now, don't look so desperate; your position is not the same as mine, and if I have a grain of influence over you it never shall be. Be calm and reasonable, and answer me a few questions. Do you want to marry Dorset merely for what he can give you?"

"No, you know I don't. You know I like him; everybody likes him, though he won't always let them say so. I could have loved him, if only—if only all those awful

thoughts weren't between us."

"Exactly, and I knew this when I urged you to exert yourself. We only meet one right man in all our lives, Griselda; and if we send him away to please our pride or any lesser thing than genuine feeling—he never comes back, and life is a very tame affair, even for the wealthy. We are disappointed and embittered, and we wreak this disappointment on all about us. Our tempers go, and our little acts of kindness and charity. We are beggared ourselves, and so we have nothing to give away to others. Don't you think, dear, that you have taken rather a good view of the situation?"

"Oh, how I should like to think it!" said Griselda wistfully; "but I took advantage of him. Some day he'll find it out, and then he'll hate me, and—and—I couldn't bear to be hated!"

"And can you bear the life I have to offer you any better?"

Griselda whitened before the curt question. For a minute or so she stared before her into vacancy; then she shivered.

"No," she said, scarcely above her breath. "I couldn't—I can't."

"You're going to be sensible, Griselda?"

"I'm going to take happiness and Harry Dorset, not because I'm entitled to them, but because I can't resist temptation. I must get away from—from—"

"From me," said Lady Southern, so mournfully that the

girl turned on her with a new expression.

"Why do you want it so much?" she asked in a troubled voice.

"Why do I want you to escape? Because you're my child, and, though I'm no pattern mother, I've got something of the old primeval instinct to protect my young. I know what it means, and I can bear it better by myself."

Griselda's face began to quiver, and it was plain that remorse would finish what other and less worthy motives had begun—the subjugation of the spirit of opposition.

"Oh, mama-I didn't think-I didn't understand-I

wasn't fair to you."

"No, dearest. That was my fault. I put the story in

other ways, because I wanted you to get away without feeling unkind. Now you are not to cry or to fancy you have been cruel and selfish. It was a mistake, and if it has hurt me, it is entirely my own fault for being so secretive with

my real feelings."

She concealed her face behind a delicate strip of cambric, fearful lest the joy upon it should arouse the suspicion of her now thoroughly subdued companion. But Griselda's heart had no room left in it for doubt; she ran to her (presumably) weeping mother and threw impulsive arms about the lady's elegant form; she pressed her warm, wet cheek to the one behind the handkerchief.

"If only you'd told me this instead of the other horrid things! It hurts, but not in the same way. I'd a thousand times rather be a beast myself than think that you-

"That I was one," Lady Southern suggested.

"Well, yes. You see, I always thought you didn't want me in the holidays; that's why I was so glad to go away and leave you. I never guessed you were cutting yourself off from me because you were in trouble and you wanted me to escape it. I thought you wanted me to marry because—I was rather expensive and rather a nuisance. And all the time, you poor, lonely, unhappy little mother, you were working for my happiness. Well, I'll take it, and I'll try to forget the ugly way it came to me, but you must have a share in it. I can't leave you all alone to that terrible struggle. You must live with us—yes, I shall insist. Harry won't mind. He likes being kind to people. We'll have chickens in that country home of his, and a garden, and a dogcart in which I'll drive you all over the country, and in the autumn we'll be quite gay. We'll have men down to shoot, and two or three of my school-friends, and give them a good time to make up for all they've done for me. Oh, it's just too good to be true, though the moral is shocking." She finished with a slight fall of enthusiasm.

Lady Southern strangled a wild desire for hysteric laughter at the thought of herself established for life in a rural

52 Some of the Horrid Details of War

solitude, but she contrived to return the girl's embrace with

satisfactory ardor.

"I can't live with you, dear. It wouldn't be fair to Harry. But I shall come and stay with you" ("in the autumn," she added mentally), "and I shall always have the thought of your safety to keep me happy and contented. Now I must go to bed or I shan't be able to interview Harry at ten o'clock. I hope to persuade him that Uganda is now quite out of the question."

"You won't do that, mama; he says we shall have to wait." But the elder lady only smiled with an air of mysterious confidence, and took her departure more than satisfied

with her evening's work.

CHAPTER VI

A TREATY IS SIGNED BUT RATHER CARELESSLY SEALED

LADY SOUTHERN felt confident that, unless provoked to self-destruction by too rigorous a course of questioning, Griselda would not now admit a too-early acquaintance with her lover's affairs, while he-she felt sure-would never stoop to question what he had elected to honor. He would condescend and she would smile, and the dangerous layer of antagonistic feeling would dissolve between them. On the following morning she went down to meet her adversary with plenty of optimism behind the slight flutter in her breast. She was at a decided advantage in that she took a pretty accurate view of a character pride had restricted, while she offered in return one in which fundamental insincerity and consistent egoism were the only ingredients he could as confidently schedule. Her enemy was in the open, while she was serenely aware of a multitude of holes and corners in which she should not hesitate to take refuge in emergency.

She offered him her hand and smiled with a feigned cordiality for which she had herself arranged repulse. His stiff acceptance of a gracious overture set him at an early disadvantage, and her half audible sigh marked for her the first score in the game. It was inevitable that, slyly accused of discourtesy, he should start the attack with more

heat and less tact than he had intended.

"I tell you frankly, Lady Southern," he said, establishing himself on a chair exactly opposite hers, "that I'm perfectly aware of being in some measure a tool to your interest. I succumbed to pressure, but please don't make the mistake of supposing me ignorant of the pleasure."

He concealed, and she knew that he concealed, the date

when suspicion had come to him, but it suited her purpose to affect unqualified acceptance of the assertion.

"You are quite right to be frank, Mr. Dorset. I knew the probable price of my venture when I decided to make it."

This ingenuous attitude was, at the least, disconcerting.

"You confess to forcing my hand," he began with some hesitation, "but, in the name of all that's illogical-or shall I say far-fetched?—why?"

"But you've yourself announced your complete under-

standing of the case."

"I understand that you want to marry your daughter as quickly as possible, but I'm not pretending to understand why you select a man with no prospects, as you would count such things."

"Oh, it is your real prospects, not this African legend, that induced me to throw Griselda in your way," she ex-

plained; and again her candor worsted him.

"So my sister-in-law has made a confidante! I'll confess I guessed it; but let me remind you that dead men's shoes have a notorious habit of disappointing the heir-at-law. think you build too confidently upon a nervous woman's fears."

"The nervous woman, Mr. Dorset, has a good many far

from nervous men behind her."

"Science, Lady Southern, has a good many mistakes to her record. She doesn't talk about them, but her victims do. You'll be the first to complain if my poor brother's case swells the roll, as I confidently expect and hope it will."

She saw fit to double. She laughed, but not with amusement.

"All this I'm to suppose is a preliminary for your withdrawal. I don't blame you; I shan't try to hold you to your midnight enthusiasms. Men of your age always act upon impulse. They're hot by candle-light and cold by daylight. But where you disappoint us in quality you atone in quantity: there are plenty of you in every country house, in every Mayfair drawing-room; Griselda is very young, very pretty. I may fail once, twice, but I am bound to achieve my purpose in the end. She won't understand; she'll be tiresome; she'll suffer, but that's our lot in life."

"My withdrawal?" he said sharply; "but I never even considered such an idea. My temperature, Lady Southern, is not influenced by candle-light or anything else that's artificial. You've entirely mistaken me. I've told you once, and I tell you again, my offer was made in full consciousness of what it entailed."

She opened her faded blue eyes in affected astonishment.

"I'm very stupid. Then this—this ebullition of—of disdain—is meant to be decorative, not menacing? You accept the position that you took last night, but you exact your test, your pound of cursing and swearing in drawingroom form? Well, I'm grateful for the form, and I'm still more grateful to you for launching your displeasure at me instead of my poor girl. You see, she'd have a difficulty in

understanding."

"I should hope so," he commented hotly. "You've disfigured the charm of her language, to some extent, but I hardly suppose even you would care to bewilder and disgust her with the story of values and sub-values connected with a person so apparently insignificant as myself; not yet, at all events, not until you have made a few of those attempts you spoke of. I give you credit for so much tact," he added, and she saw her opening. It was necessary to convert this satisfactory impression into a solid belief, and again she laughed, this time with unmistakable and bitter scorn.

"Oh, you're shrewd enough to guess that, are you? You've recognized her mental incapacity to accept my sordid doctrines? She's a child—yes; and you can appreciate her innocence, her natural animosity towards all that is practical. She's a child, but have you ever thought what it costs us—the parents—to keep up that fascinating attitude of mind? Until yesterday I never told her the meaning of poverty, and she winced at the very first breath of it like a

I might just as well have talked of dynamics or metaphysics, for all understanding of the topic she could or would have furnished. She's no child of mine—I've always understood social values easily enough; she's a Southern through and through; and what she gives to your appreciation of the picturesque she takes from the claim I might have made upon her sympathy and companionship. I'm to her very much what I am to you: a person to be politely evaded, to be delicately disdained. This isn't rebellion of any sort; it's the mere statement of hard fact."

There was profound knowledge of her subject under the faintly querulous note in which she uttered this complaint; surreptitiously, warily, she drew the line that he wished to see between mother and daughter; with apparent unconsciousness she revealed to him the divorce that nature had pronounced—the very divorce for which he longed so ar-

dently.

"There are nerves in Griselda," she added, with the same petulant air of reminiscence, "that I dare no more touch than the bombshell lying ready to explode. There are certain ideas, on which these primitive natures are founded, which we, worldlings though we are, fear to tamper with, until compelled by dire necessity. Hard and cold as I am, I can yet recognize and, to some extent, pity this simplicity in others. It makes me-well-we'll say uncomfortableto think of these peculiar people coming in contact with life; they are so entirely at the mercy of all that is brutal in human nature. For this reason, if for no more egotistical one, I'm glad your mind is of the constant order; only, I should like to warn you that simplicity—Griselda's sort of simplicity—is very far from stupidity. Show her one-tenth of the patronage—we won't call it contempt—that you've shown me this morning, and she'll turn from you as naturally and as effectively as she turned to you last night. Already, if I am not much mistaken, she has begun to wonder if it was only pity that induced you to stretch out a helping hand; already she has begun to wonder if the whole surprising episode was anything more than a delightful dream. If you want it to substantiate you will have to persuade her that there is no grain of reluctance in your mind. You and I are essentially antagonistic, but I think we are at one in a desire to spare Griselda something of the knowledge that has spoilt for us the flavor of careless existence. You have read me pretty thoroughly, and I'm content to be branded by your disapproval, so long as you've the acumen not to brand her along with me; so long as you have the generosity to forgive her her purely material relationship to myself."

He was aware of feeling very markedly in the wrong

under the lash of this appeal.

"You can't suppose," he said uncomfortably, "that I

should dream of talking to her as-as-"

"As you are talking to me? Oh no; but you might have talked to her as though there were grains of what we'll call my eccentricities in her, and a rupture could have sprung from a single careless look or word. Of course, this marriage is to my own interest—I can't afford a grown-up daughter; but that doesn't prevent it embracing the happiness of very different people. Now will you let me pass on the business side of the matter?"

"With pleasure. I go abroad almost at once; leave here in a few days at latest—in fact, I may be called up to town

at any time."

"Don't you think, under the circumstances, that you could resign the farce with dignity?" she asked; but his mouth

tightened ominously.

"You've taken the position, Lady Southern, but it remains just what it was when you thought it worth the exercise of your ingenuity."

She bowed gracefully to the obstinate in his demeanor.

"And when do you expect to return to England, Mr. Dorset?"

"In about three years, possibly less. Griselda is so young that I consider the delay an advantage."

She faced his air of defiance with irritating equanimity.

It was plain that she regarded the three years with amusement only.

"I presume that your brother's death would release you

from your duties?"

He was forced to own that the contingency she mentioned had been included in his contract.

"Then there's only one more point: the engagement must be kept to ourselves; society wouldn't swallow your Uganda prospects any more than I could have done, and we don't want to be a laughing-stock to our friends or to betray poor Annie's sad secret."

Harry smiled rather sourly.

"Our united weaknesses certainly seem to demand tem-

porary reserve."

"Now you're not to go away with the idea that I'm your enemy," she said, rising to define the end of the interview, "for I'm nothing of the sort; I can't afford the luxury of having enemies. We were bound to have an uncomfortable quarter of an hour, and we've certainly had it—at least, I have-but I don't bear malice. Shake hands, and believe me when I promise to play mother-in-law as unobtrusively as possible."

He took her slim fingers with some degree of awkward-

ness.

"I'm conscious of having failed in manners, Lady Southern."

"Then, if I've failed in morals, according to your code, we'll cry 'quits.' Besides," she added, not without a grain of the malice she had disavowed, "you're the indisputable master of the occasion; you're not the slave of passion we parents usually have to face."

"And Griselda is not to be worried; that's the bargain," he said, by way of turning this not very pleasant subject. "Promise me you won't talk to her about anything more

serious than frocks."

"But frocks are a very serious question with us, Harry."

"Oh-well, don't talk to her at all. I suppose you couldn't take her into the country this spring?"

Lady Southern checked a rising grimace.

"I'm so sorry, but the country doesn't suit me. The lambs bleat so, and I always end with hay fever; besides, she ought to be presented, you know."

This remark was purely tentative, and met with the

response it angled for.

"I should prefer her to wait and be presented after her marriage. What about The Court? Southern tells me you

are always welcome there."

"The Court fidgets us both," she explained; "that's one of our few mutual sensations; and then—there'll be a bride in it before long."

"So there will. It must be left to you, then?"

"I think so. I'll undertake to keep her happy"; and, with a rustle of silk petticoats, she left him to wonder how

much of the victory had been his.

She left him to a softened estimate of her, at all events. He was compelled to own that her actions had the spur of unkind fortune behind them, and from that thought it was easy and it was pleasant to drift into a sea of speculation concerning the unsuspecting girl round whom their warfare had raged.

But he seemed scarcely to have embarked upon this train of thought before a telegram was brought him, and he learnt that his movements were to be accelerated. He was commanded to present himself at the Colonial Office on the following morning, and, further, he was to hold himself in

readiness to sail in three days' time.

At first he insisted that it was his objection to being hustled that roused in him so violent a spirit of rebellion, but presently his honesty gave to the sensation another name. He allowed that it was the curtailment of his intercourse with Griselda that dismayed him. She infected more than pity, it transpired, more than chivalry. An impulse, new and bold as that of the preceding night, was urging him to throw yet more of his constitutional prejudices overboard. He would go to the Colonial Office, and he would urge, in a fashion hitherto disdained, his brother's state;

he would explain that what he had tried to christen a contingency was really a probability. There were always men prepared to take these stepping-stones to advance at the last moment; he would be released—they could do nothing else, if he quoted, what he had hitherto kept back, the absolute unanimity of the different verdicts of Harley Street. He would allow that, reluctantly but indisputably, he had been convinced; but even as he reached the dry land of this conclusion and all it entailed, he was gripped by an ancient tendency and forced back on to his old ground. It was a single and an insignificant thought that effected the rescue the thought of Lady Southern's smile; but as a trifling detail sometimes alters a great issue, so did this. He could play no further into those slim hands whose touch still lingered on his own. Dignity rebelled; knew, too, how to exact penalty for past truancy. Taking all flippant sensation firmly in hand, he despatched his curt but acquiescent answer to the authorities; he wrote to Scotland, whither he now saw himself compelled to travel on the following night, if he wished to say "good-by" to his brother, and he could only promise the stifled spirit of sentimentality a few hours of indulgence.

And, meanwhile, Griselda sat on the low window-sill of her mother's boudoir, prepared to meet her lover in the

manner Lady Southern wished.

She wanted to love and be loved; she wanted kind looks and flattering words—in sum, a passage for those divine sensations which had inspired her dreaming mind

and still haunted her memory.

She knew that Harry would turn from her if he knew the truth, but she also knew that the truth had an extenuating quality in it that he would be far too inexperienced to detect. She loved him and she had intrigued for him; if he once looked at the intrigue he would never permit himself to look at the love.

The garden below her had a face, the face of a sphinx; it might be false, but it was incomparably beautiful. Her mother's face, to which she turned presently, summoned by

the sound of an opening door, was full of vulgar prose be-

neath its smile of triumph.

"Don't tell me anything, mama; I know it all; what you said, what he said, even what I'm going to say by-and-by. We're to ride after lunch, and I won't go to him any sooner. I'm always brave in a riding-habit."

"Just as you please, dear. He didn't ask for you—I fancy he's letters to write; but you understand that there's

nothing to be afraid of, nothing to explain?"

"Yes, I understood that directly I saw your face.

There's one question, though; what about Uganda?"

"Uganda?—oh, he's obstinate, but it will be a case of the King of France, with twenty thousand men, marched up the hill and then marched down again'; take my word for it, he'll be back within the year."

"I knew he'd go," said Griselda defiantly, as she rose to

leave the room.

But later, in the saddle, much of the defiance and all the bitterness went out of her mood. At the luncheon table she had learned of Dorset's abrupt departure, but the knowledge scarcely troubled her. She had something of the child's devotion to the claims of the moment, and her thoughts were too firmly fixed upon this coming ride with him to allow any very serious meditation on the separation so swiftly to follow it.

The little mare would be all wires and innocent mischief after a week of comparative idleness, and she loved to battle with the dainty creature; and to-day there would be a second semblance of battle, there would be a yet sweeter wrestle with yet vaguer force, the force whose blood was illusion, in whom demand and surrender fought an eternal,

a fascinating civil war.

"We'll go a long way, Harry," she said, as they wheeled out of the drive; and with her maiden utterance of his first name there came an enchanting air of embarrassment.

Even without his new orders he would have been disinclined to meddle with the delightful effect of innocent gaiety that animated her. It tickled his vanity, for the moment at least, to pronounce her immature, expensive, and adorable. The lover was too near the surface to risk this novel sensation by tracking so ugly and so obscure a point as the

possible conspiracy between mother and daughter.

For an hour they kept up a brisk exchange of banter. He played the benignant despot, she the daring, pampered childslave; she offered him whims and fancies, youthful and pretty weaknesses, and, if she chose to conceal some of the main tendencies of her personality, it was done as much

in sympathy for his taste as in fear of self-betrayal.

It was impossible, he found, to insert his more serious ideas into the charm of the hour. It was too short, too full of motion, mental and physical, too full of sunshine. would write to her later and explain what she was coaxing him to ignore—the solemnity of their compact. What a strange compact it was! he paused more than once to consider. Did he really think to mate with this sparkling, pouting creature, this daughter of Bertha Southern, barely emancipated from her schoolroom? Was this really chivalry, this pulse beating at such unfamiliar speed in his temples? He tried to frown into the winter woodland, seeing that it was impossible to frown at her; but there was laughter in every stream of running water set free by the sunshine, and the laugh was against him, and yet not disagreeable to him.

For an hour enthusiaism kept the intoxicating pace; then it slackened, and, by degrees, a note or two of melancholy cadence touched both minds, weakened, possibly, by too unqualified an acceptance of emotion. They had reached a narrow country lane, such an one as in mid-summer offers an almost prison-like seclusion to the heated traveler. Even now the leafless elms scarcely allowed a view of the sun, so closely were they packed on either side of the roadway, while underneath, the thick carpet of rotten leaves gave a soft and slippery foothold to the horses' hoofs. The way

wound uphill, and they took it slowly.

"Horrid," said Griselda, with a shiver. "It's like an old, old man, who shuts himself up in his stuffery of a house

and says, 'It is finished, take me away; I'm ready for death.'"

"That's better," he objected, "than not being ready, bet-

ter than being hauled off, kicking and protesting."

"I shall be certain to kick and protest, Harry. I shall never be ready. Only seventy years, and—and—you're going to waste three of them in that awful country."

"Perhaps I shan't be away quite so long as we fancy."

"You mean if your brother dies?"

She made the momentous suggestion consciously. The finger of fatalism touched, for the moment, her weakened passion for enjoyment. To herself she was saying firmly: "If he asks when mama told me, I shall confess; if he doesn't ask, it means that Providence doesn't mean me to tell." She never knew how many seconds of acute suspense followed the registration of this pregnant oath. Dorset was looking at her, and she looked steadily back at him.

"So Lady Southern has told you," he said at last. "Well, I'm not sorry; it was hardly fair to keep you in the dark. But you mustn't suppose—you mustn't hope—I mean, you must clearly understand that it's nothing more than a contingency, and one that means misfortune and sor-

row to a good many others."

"I understand," she answered mechanically, and she still stared at him with parted lips, waiting for the question that should take him out of her life, the question that never came; instead, he pointed forward with his whip.

"The top of this beastly hill. Give the mare a shake-up,

or we shan't be in till after dark."

She had obeyed; the whip had fallen on a sleek flank, the horses had broken into eager movement, and they were in the open country again, with that sense of oppression outwitted.

Well pleased with one another, they had reached the stable-yard at the hour when dusk is gathering, to find the place very still. From the distant windows of the kitchen came sounds of revelry; the grooms were plainly enjoying a little Christmas relaxation, and only a whinny from a

loose-box gave welcome to the returned riders. It was the voice of Peter's idle hunter asking for sympathy under the affliction of this enforced spell of idleness.

Griselda laughed as she passed him. "Poor boy! it was a shame to bring you here, where there are no foxes, only

women."

She looked with unmistakable coquetry at her companion; he had dismounted, and he stood below, waiting, apparently, for the pleasure of lifting her down.

She slipped her knee over the pommel of the saddle, and

hesitated.

"I never let anybody—" she began saucily, and stopped, looked curiously into his upturned face. The mask had dropped: it was the face of a young, impulsive man; the mouth wore a half-smile; the eyes were wide open and full of light; the arms were coming up to enfold her, and, involuntarily, she leaned down towards them.

"Only a boy," she said faintly, "only a dear boy after

all. I'm so glad."

He forgot to wince at the accusation; he scarcely heard it. Dimly he was aware that his years of beloved self-sufficiency was being ridiculed, were paling, passing, joining the ghosts of unregarded conditions; vaguely he was conscious that an old mistress cried, and that his treacherous heart cared nothing for her protest—cared only for the story written on that flushed child's face above, a story very nearly missed and oddly valuable. To the mischief and the entreaty, to the sweet, strange play of feature, and the yet sweeter and stranger movement of the young form down towards his clasp, there could be but a single answer. Had he forgotten it? Had he ever learnt it? Dare he produce it?

She slipped into his arms, but, as his emotion found courage and power of expression, hers suddenly chanced upon a vein of opposition.

"Not now—not yet," she gasped, and thrust her light riding-whip between their two faces. "It's all too soon,

Harry; let me go-I'm frightened."

Thanks to the prosaic touch of the leather on his cheek, he recaptured something of his old disposition. Back into his voice came the familiar ring, sweet, patronizing, and controlled.

"Too soon for what, Griselda? What did you suspect—expect?" But she wrenched herself free, and fled into the house to carry her scarlet cheeks to cover, and he disposed of the horses at his leisure, not ungrateful to her for that access of childish terror, since it restored to him, just in the nick of time, his ancient and still dear command of temper.

There would be but a few moments of privacy in which, with luck, and Lady Southern's assistance, he would contrive to say "good-by" to her, and he vowed to go through the ceremony without a second lapse into what he now man-

aged to christen an undignified excess of feeling.

Luck and Lady Southern did not fail him, nor did the

desired attitude.

In the well-lit study, in a plain white frock, with her color reduced by nervousness and distress, Griselda was not so disturbing to his imagination as she had seemed in the stable-yard.

"You'll be good and patient, won't you?" he said, and

watched the dimple appear at the corner of her mouth.

"Depends how long you stay away," she said, with more courage than he had expected, and perhaps a little more than he cared about.

"We don't judge morals by time, Griselda, and your eyes are far too bright for this sad occasion."

She dropped them, and deliberately he set a kiss on each of the lowered lids.

"You're to keep them shut till I come home," he added, a trifle less steadily.

"For three years!" she exclaimed, and looked at him with what professed to be indignation.

"You may dream," he conceded graciously. "Of you, I suppose, all day and all night."

"That goes without saying; isn't it good enough?"

"No, indeed!"

66 Treaty Signed but Carelessly Sealed

"Then we'll compromise. You must go to sleep, but you

may talk a little in your sleep."

"That's a bargain, Harry Dorset, and don't go back on it. People talk all sorts of nonsense in their sleep, and they're not responsible."

"Your carriage, sir."

The young man could only evince his superiority to the multitude by accepting the ill-timed information with an air of unruffled serenity, while Griselda took base advantage of the interruption to make her escape to her own room. She sat down on the edge of the bed, her heart thumping oddly as she listened to the scrunch of wheels on the gravel below, and the cheerfully indifferent voices of the guests wishing the traveler "God-speed."

CHAPTER VII

A HAUNTED HOUSE

Most of the people in this narrative are connected with the county of Sussex. Mrs. Fawcett, indeed, came of the stock whose actual fingers were responsible for much of the luxuriance of the land. There was mental as well as physical sinew in her progenitors, if not herself; it was as natural to them to push a prosperous way upwards as it was to the green saplings under their care; and it was now a nice point whether the lady, into whose hands the greater portion of the family wealth had flowed, had built this central effigy to her importance over the very heart of her ancestral cottage home in answer to an impulse of legitimate pride, or in aristocratic disregard of the memories of her neighbors.

The mansion was certainly assertive enough in style and rich enough in attributes, to tame the normal amount of antagonism in modern society. It stood in a bend of the coast between Beachy Head and Hastings, looking out to sea over a wide acreage of garden and pasture-land affecting at least the air of benign patronage proper to the time-

scorner.

Wearying, perhaps, of pompous assurance, and turning inwards and westwards towards an imaginary heart of Sussex, a pedestrian would have found himself, after an hour or two of cross-country work, before a building of very different aspect, one whose sole claim to notice was its genuine air of antiquity.

A child might have designed this square and naked block of stone. A dozen tiny windows, placed at regular intervals, broke the monotony of the face, but the sides and the rear had obviously been sacrificed to the false economy that ruled not so very long ago, when light and air were regarded as the perquisites of the wealthy. Originally the place had possessed lands in keeping with its size, but these had been gradually sacrificed, now to the patriotic fervor of a Royalist, now to the ill-fortune of a gambler; soldiers had lived and loved and pretty consistently lost within these gloomy walls, until nature, wearying of their bad luck or their bad management, had obliterated the race a century back, and only this coffin-like memento of it remained.

"The Monk's Revel"—for such a name could still, with difficulty, be deciphered on the ancient pillars by the gate—belonged ostentatiously to the past. Historical suggestion seemed to emanate from its gray walls, and melancholy, not to mention neglect, had assuredly "marked it for her own." The rooks cawed mournfully in the elms behind the stable, and the grass was long, even under the front windows; while such flowers as there were in the diamond-patterned beds were mostly of the perennial genus, allowed to make little demand upon the purse or the attention of man.

And this hint of indifference was confirmed by the house itself. No delicate muslin fluttered from behind the dark panes; the curtains could only be deciphered by a keen eye on a bright morning, and then rare colors would form out of the darkness: a patch of Eastern red or blue—the gleam of silk, woven in some far distant clime; occasionally, even, a bronze or marble nymph would detach herself from the shadows to charm the observer by a semi-revelation of her curved limbs.

To the neighborhood, soured by long repulse, the place and its inhabitants were frankly irritating. The owner was a certain Silas Glover, connected with his property by the sole but conclusive right of purchase. He made no attempt to affect the manners of a feudal or a modern squire, though his wife, Gwendolen, might have posed, suitably enough, for the complement to such a boast.

There was in her bearing the restraint of our grandmother's day; in her walk and in her carriage there was the reminder of the backboard. She spoke slowly and musically, with a slight lift of the voice at the end of her phrases that

gave to each a delicate finish. She was extremely tall, and only a trifle too thin for her inches, giving just the artistic hint of delicacy, not the disfiguring assertion. There was youth in her fair complexion, in the oval contour of cheek and chin, in her full lips; but there was the enemy of youth in her great dark eyes. They seemed big and still, with their weight of mournful knowledge, and they alone were in complete harmony with the effect produced by the masses of snow-white hair piled almost with eighteenth century elaboration on the top of a small head.

These physical incongruities might have been forgiven, might indeed have been approved, but the lady's aloofness was another matter. Even since her arrival as a bride, she had endorsed her middle-aged husband's attitude. There had been no friendship between The Monk's Revel and the few houses of social import within walking or driving distance. First calls had been responded to, but so slowly as to warn all but the most persistent that they were unwelcome, and only on rare occasions did Mrs. Glover go out of her way to pay, or to return, a civility. And these few occasions could invariably be traced to a business motive, to a command from the grim-visaged head of the house, for Glover was by no means an idle person.

His father had been a wealthy manufacturer, the carver of his own fortune, a man of peasant blood and infinite resolution. He had married an American, plebeian as himself by birth, but aristocratic by temper. She had brought capital into his purse; she had helped to turn the scale of fortune already dipping in his favor; but, with fortune secured, Glover began to lose his nerve, began to realize the price charged by nature for financial supremacy. Pausing, almost for the first time, to rest and to meditate, fears and doubts assailed the overstrained mind; the money frightened the man, spelling for him, suddenly, a force difficult to hold; parsimony crept in beside speculative courage, and, rage as his wife would against this insidious enemy of her comfort, she found herself powerless to worst the invader. Silas, their only child, grew up with this quarrel loud in his ears,

and in his veins lurked the main tendencies of his parents. He wanted his ease, but he also wanted the thought of some secret hoard behind him as security against the possible attack of evil fortune; in addition, he wanted mental employment. He became an orphan before he came of age, and he had his intentions already drawn up. For nearly twenty years he traveled, avoiding all friends and almoners; he sought pleasure and profit in the far East and the far West, coming home at frequent intervals to keep an eye upon the investments he had placed in the hands of persons he took care to connect subtly with his interests. He bought curios, of whose value he was an almost uncanny judge, seeming to guess by instinct when a certain artist or a certain class of art could be pushed with safety. He dealt in ancient pictures and modern bric-à-brac; in grotesque ivories and weirdly colored glass; in tapestry and oak; even in houses and lands. He was seldom seen or spoken to by his clients, but for years after his return to England he worked tirelessly. Under his eye passed every document appertaining to purchase or sale; and this house in which he established himself was a veritable museum for such articles as had bloomed slightly in advance of their market. He had sufficient education to enable him both to enjoy the possession of these valuables and to suck from each a fair share of artistic pleasure before committing it to the task of augmenting his already large fortune.

He wrote more or less authentic, but always impressive, history of these art treasures, and he knew how to get such history inserted in the magazines at the right moment, thus ensuring a welcome for the particular commodity he wished

to exploit.

He was cold-blooded, long-headed, and apparently free from any taint of sentimentality, but at forty-four he succumbed to one of those lapses from natural tendency to which all flesh is heir—to a creature with tragic eyes, whose "no—no—no" turned his iron will to water for the time being. He had understood the card-sharping old father, with his good blood (disgraced a hundred times), well

enough. He had been no dupe, but had yielded to unexpected and irresistible inward pressure; and with his expensive new curio beside him, he had set himself to work to deduce from it what he could of satisfaction. At first she fascinated him by her graceful aloofness of demeanor, but presently she began to irritate. He could make no headway. She was suspiciously meek for a woman of such fine temper; she followed too readily his demand for seclusion; she, not yet come to her maturity, a girl of twenty, asked of him and of fortune no more than her bed and board. Even his egoism saw the incongruity of it. He had traveled; he was ready for his armchair and retrospection; but that she should be content to be buried with him, ancient Eastern fashion, piqued his intelligence. He searched for hidden streams of rebellion, but in vain. Contentedly, or at least passively, she wrought in silk the gay patterns other women wrought into their lives, and many a wonderful strip of embroidery passed from her clever fingers to adorn the country church where she worshiped alone Sunday after Sunday.

She dipped into the rare books her husband collected; but when the one in which she studied was sent away (as often for the pleasure of denuding her as not), she moved calmly on to another. For years no method of provocation, however ingenious, could surprise or prick her into any show of emotion, but Silas, looking back, could smile sourly at a single memory. Like his father, he had been accorded an only child-a boy-and Anthony, at four years old, had begun to stammer quaint conceits into the ear of any who would listen. And suddenly her face had broken into movement; nonsense came occasionally to her lips; laughter welled up in those tragic pools out of which she looked so patiently on life. She had forgotten her husband and her fate, and on a wave of passion, half jealous, half physiological, his interest had returned to speculate more fiercely than ever about this secret woman at his hearth.

She had been eluding him; she had been suppressing values; she was more sentient than he had supposed, and

that sentiency must be set to work for him. She must cater more actively to his curiosity. She had a secret—that he had always known; but he had imagined it to be the common female secret that accompanies a loveless marriage. He had fancied her energies atrophied by romantic disappointment, but the dead thing stirred; he had the power to hurt and she the power to suffer. In the light of this revelation her reserve took a new significance. He did not want the secret; he wanted, instead, the sight of her anxiety as she realized that his suspicion was alive again, in a more active form, too; he wanted to dangle detection over a head conscious, he now felt certain, of important issues in the concealed point. She had been so quick to note his renewed attention, so quick and so drastic in her response to it. Abruptly, but not ungently, she had released her skirt from the child's clinging fingers; abruptly the nonsense and the laughter ceased to sound. He was no fool, and he found the inference obvious. She feared to bring the little boy into her circle of disaster or disgrace; she drew back, and time pressed on. The child learned to take his questions to his nurses—to his tutors; he learned to relegate his lovely mother to the only place she could not disown-that of chief ornament in a cheerless home.

For years the game of persecution went on, to the tireless enjoyment of the man, to the helpless misery of the woman. Glover would throw out suggestions and questions calculated to alarm and bewilder; Gwendolen would reply to them with a gentle ambiguity she knew he found incriminating. The dilatoriness of his methods puzzled as well as tormented her; but when Anthony was ten years old she obtained a partial release.

Glover had a stroke, brought on by one of his rare indulgences in emotion. He was sitting with his boy, when a letter acquainted him with the treachery of one of his employees. The supposed tool had been a little too sharp even for his astute master. The sum involved was serious, though not by any means disastrous; but Glover collapsed before the ignominy of the unsuspected attack, and went

through phase after phase of passion. Anthony watched this first revelation of weakness with a curiosity quite untainted by fear or by pity. When it culminated in a seizure, when he saw the man fall to the ground with distorted face and limbs, he offered a certain amount of practical assistance: he loosened his father's collar, he gave him water, and finally, he went to summon assistance; but he went with reluctance, almost as though he feared some fascinating, new manifestation might take place during his absence.

Glover never recovered the full use of his limbs or his faculties. He could talk, though he rarely did so, and the horrible pastime in which he had so long indulged seemed to sink more or less into the backwater of his mind. He often threw malevolent glances in the direction of his wife, he still addressed her with sarcasm; but his deformity imprisoned him in an ever-narrowing circle of routine, and what little mental ingenuity was left to him was chiefly employed in his business. Even here he was forced to depend more and more upon the sagacity and the honesty of a young secretary he had been training for some years previous to his breakdown, and, oddly enough, the man served him with zeal and devotion, as did Carter the valet—presumably from fear, for there was, assuredly, nothing to esteem in their grim master.

He spent his days in the study, on the ground floor, only joining his family at breakfast and dinner, for which meals he was wheeled in on the invalid chair which he seldom left, and in which he took his short spells of recreation, conveyed up and down the drive on sunny mornings by the energetic Carter.

In this melancholy domestic atmosphere Anthony grew up. He went to no school, but his father chose his tutors with care. They were many, for the boy was difficult and the house lugubrious. Some went of their own accord, but many were expelled by the artifice of the precocious youth, who could gauge, with remarkable astuteness, the type with which he had to deal; and if it failed to appeal to his

peculiar taste, he was not slow to make the position untenable to a gentleman of any susceptibility. Even at fourteen, Anthony was averse to grooves; he wanted variety of thought, perhaps because he got little of action. Directly his tutor's mind ceased to stimulate, he set to work upon the man's dismissal, but in so roundabout and crafty a manner as to baffle protest. He picked these varied brains (Oxford products, for the most part) with the greed of a gourmet, just as he had picked the illuminative points from his father's seizure. His mother's personality pandered to the lighter and vaguer qualities of his mind. The scrutiny of her became his favorite recreation. He could disentangle so much suspicion, so much conviction; enough to tickle, never to satisfy, his imagination. Her girlhood must have been a time of storm and stress-witness that prematurely white head; her marriage could have been no common concession to her pride. Investigation was compelled to circle, never to alight on, any definite conclusion. mystery was insoluble, and therefore it preserved its charm.

Until the age of nineteen Anthony's life might have been pretty nearly divided into two: the creation of mental adventure, and the destruction of animal life under the decorous

name of sport.

Then came a demand for change of scene—for width of canvas. The tutor of that day spoke of travel, and the young man eagerly embarked upon a battle with the old one in the cupboard, as he irreverently termed his father. It was not the first. More than once he had twisted money from those reluctant fingers; for Silas was secretly proud of his handsome, heartless son: he felt himself to be subtly flattered by that son's tenacity and deliberation; he recognized his own will recreated, preserved to posterity.

Anthony went abroad: to Paris, to Constantinople, to Cairo, to certain French winter resorts where Londoners congregate. Financed for a year, his luck at the gaming-table—to which he eventually found his way—carried the two young men, of whom it would be hard to say which was tutor and which pupil, into an extra six months of

experience, and they returned to England during the winter that had seen the assembling and dispersing of Mrs. Fawcett's house-party. His education now considered complete, and no plans for his future being advanced, Anthony settled down to a term of seclusion.

He had no intention of allowing it to be unduly prolonged, but for the moment he was conscious of a desire for solitude and introspection. He wanted to schedule the experience of the past in a mind prone to relegate each sensation to a definite shelf; he had his place actual and his place speculative to mark on that plot of ground lately invaded, and his course onward to select.

He knew that he had been what is called a success, but he also knew that the term, as perfunctorily accepted, would not satisfy him. It was not the outer bulwarks of society he wanted to scale, save in so far as they were means to an end; it was the inner, palpitating heart, the movement of sensitive organizations, that he meant to dissect, as he had dissected the meaning of his father's mysterious long-ago struggle with disease.

He was not ungrateful, however, to nature for tricking him out neatly. He was perfectly aware that his slim form, trained to athletic exercise, pleased the general and often the particular eye—that his fair skin, burned to a healthy brown, was calculated to charm the lady of uncertain age but certain influence; he was aware that in spite of his extreme youth he could appeal, without excess of effort, to the immature schoolgirl and the woman with a past; and he did not forget to register a vote of thanks to his late traveling-companion, whose discreetly worded revelations concerning the prospects of his charge had certainly smoothed the way to distinction.

And the spring came to this dark house as to its happier neighbors. The sun, slipping through an eastern window, flickered with incongruous gaiety over the vast and shadowy hall, revealing something rare in every corner.

A large oak table stood in the center of it, laid for breakfast, and Glover, with his back to the light, trifled with a strip of toast, while his wife sat opposite, divided from him by at least four yards of damask. She, too, made a mere pretense of refreshing nature, but as she stirred her coffee she looked out into the sunshine with unusual invigoration in her dark eyes.

Anthony was wont to time his arrival to coincide, as far as possible, with his father's departure, and on this particular morning the study door closed upon Mr. Glover's invalid chair just as another opened to admit the young man into his mother's presence.

"Going to be fine," he announced, in the voice that so rarely showed any variety of accent, whatever the utterance.

"Yes," she said, almost as indifferently as he had spoken;

"but the coffee is cold; I'll ring for more."

She touched a silver beast of antediluvian shape at her elbow, and the shrill summons brought a maid, capless and breathless, who took the coffee-pot away to be replenished. Gwendolen watched the girl's brusque movements with absent pertinacity.

"Is she temporary or permanent, mother?"

"I can't tell you; I can only draw deductions."

"And where has Mary been deduced to? She was tidy, at least."

"Last week she cleaned the ivories, Tony, with an invention of her own—she pointed them out to me with considerable pride. But two days ago I looked into their particular cabinet, and they were gone; and when I rang for Mary, she had gone too—this girl answered the bell. I ask no questions, and I am told no lies."

"The duties of a secretary," said her son calmly, "would

be difficult to define in this house."

"I think Mr. Leighton likes the diversity of employment," she commented, without a trace of bitterness.

"He even likes my father, if I'm not much mistaken."

But the girl re-entering, the subject was allowed to drop.

"And now, what about the wedding, mother?"

She glanced out again, with an air of hesitation.

"No excuse whatever," he said, translating what he sup-

posed to be her thoughts. "Wind's in the north, and nothing of it; the roads are perfect, and the horses in want of exercise."

"It's so long since I went anywhere."

"Exactly; high time you made a move; besides, there's your new dress and your acceptance."

"Yes," she said, still with uncertainty.

"It was odd of them to ask us," he ventured, with a keen

eye on her.

"Odd to ask me to Alva Dane's wedding with Peter Southern? Why, I've known the Southerns for more than twenty years."

"Not these Southerns," he said dryly; and her expression

changed.

"Well—no. I suppose the invitation was a civility from Mrs. Fawcett; she has always given me a yearly call ever since your father succeeded in getting her that Van Dyke at such a reasonable figure."

"A call which you've as regularly returned," he said, and

brought a slight access of color to her cheek.

"Yes; I'm not a sociable person, Tony, but I'm interested in a few old friends, and at Mrs. Fawcett's there's occasional talk of them. My particular Southerns are all dead and gone, but I should like to see their children. I think we'll go."

"I'm quite sure we will," he amended. "I'm interested too in the family, though I don't know any of its members. Their names used to crop up in conversation abroad.

There's a Bertha, isn't there?"

"Yes, the last Lady Southern-the widow of Sir George."

"And a Griselda; of all outlandish names."

"She's the daughter; what did they say of her?"

"That she failed to play champion to Bertha, whose eloquent resentment is much quoted in certain drawing-rooms."

"Did they speak of the bride, Anthony?"

"Yes. The women said she was too fair; the men grew pensive at her name: one could fancy them victimized to some extent by that same excess of fairness. But it was Mrs. Fawcett who provoked the main shafts of our satire."

"She is the grandmother; she was the mother of poor

little Emmy."

"I understood it was rich little Emmy," he objected.

Gwendolen shook her head.

"Emmy was sold to George Dane and a prospective baronetcy, which in the end he never inherited. He was a dreadful man, always on somebody's toes."

"And did Emmy never rebel?"

"No; she had no spirit; you had only to look at her to see that. Minnie used to say—" But here the speaker paused, as though conscious of having drifted across the line of discretion.

"Who was Minnie, mother? and what did she say?"

"As if you cared what a servant said years ago about an unhappy wife."

"I assure you, I do care. If she'd been a happy wife I

should have asked no questions."

"Well, Minnie was first a housemaid at The Court for years and years, then she married one of the gamekeepers and became a very unhappy wife herself. She lost her only child, mainly, I think, owing to the cruelty of her husband, and she became the foster-mother to Emmy's little girl, for Emmy died when Alva was born. She was very delicate—the baby, I mean, and they let Minnie take her away into her own country air. There she grew strong and well—she owes her life, she owes everything to Minnie." She finished with a flush of excitement rising once more to her cheek.

"I suppose she has been turned into a lady's-maid," he

commented, watching her more eagerly than usual.

"No; she was nurse for a good many years, and then Mrs. Fawcett sent her away. People say she was jealous of the poor soul's devotion to the child; anyway, she was sent back to The Court, where she lives now."

"I met the bridegroom-elect in Paris," Anthony observed;

and she turned to him, her air of reminiscence gone.

"Did he look the sort of a man to make her happy?"

"That depends on her taste. I gather that Emmy was meek and spiritless, George a boor: the daughter ought not to be mentally exacting. I think he might suit her well enough."

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply.

"That Southern looked like an ordinary good fellow, but the ordinary good fellow only appeals to a certain class of woman. If Alva is as primitively constructed as her stock suggests, it ought to be an excellent venture."

"When you're older, Anthony, you won't rate mere complexity so highly." But he only smiled, well pleased to have

roused her, if only to disapproval of his cynical views.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TYING OF KNOTS

GWENDOLEN looked into the long mirror before which she stood.

"Do you approve me, Tony?"

He took a careful survey of the lilac silk, with its touch of violet velvet and its repetition of the delicate lace that embellished the bonnet.

"I've never seen you properly dressed before," he said slowly; "it makes a difference, a bigger difference than I could have imagined; the rivals of twenty years ago will be bound to suffer."

She looked sharply at him, but decided to restrain the

retort rising to her lip.

The untidy maid announced the carriage, and ran for cushions and a footstool. Gwendolen paused with one foot on the step of the victoria, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Anthony looked from her face to the smart new livery of the groom beside her.

"A good fit, eh?" he commented quietly; and again curb-

ing her desire to reply, she took her seat.

"It was a surprise for you, mother. I sent for a tailor from town; those old drab liveries were a disgrace."

"It was very kind," she began doubtfully, and he laughed.

"I'm never kind, and you know it. I wanted to make a certain effect to-day. The bills will go to the governor; he wants an occasional rousing. By-and-by I shall take the house servants in hand; Leighton is getting a bit too enterprising, and our ménage a bit too haphazard."

He leaned back in his seat, and for nearly half an hour there was silence. But as they turned from the main road into narrow country lanes Gwendolen's expression began to acquire animation. The young man at her side watched her cautiously, but it was plain she had forgotten him; it was equally plain that the route they took roused in her ancient and pleasant memories.

"Ah," she exclaimed suddenly, involuntarily, "the little tower!" And following the direction of her glance he found it, gray and ruined, against the clear blue of the

horizon line.

"It's not many miles from The Court," he observed in the soft note of one who fears to disturb a vision.

"They look so different at night," she went on, unsuspecting, "with the stars above and the mist creeping below, like a white snake, in and out of the woodland. I used to think, I used to wonder-" But some instinct recalled her to the present and the cold eyes of the youth beside her. "These are my nonsense moods, Tony; they are old age touching an idle, rusty mind. Don't listen so acutely; my folly is really not worth the trap you set."

"I set no trap, mother; but old age is always interesting: we like to look at a ruined tower or a ruined mind. Tell me

about this one."

"You wouldn't understand. There are no ruined towers, there is no mist in your life; you see things clearly or you ignore them. It's wise, but—it limits our acquaintance."

"Then if you won't talk of the past we'll discuss the

present. How old is the young lady we go to settle?"

"Twenty-three, I think."

"Cairo saddled her with at least eight seasons. What a work of art it is to unravel a lady's age out of the statements of her friends, her lovers, and her rivals; not to complicate the case by adding her own acknowledgment!"

"I'm glad they gave her time to think," said Gwendolen softly; "those children of eighteen who embark so gaily on

marriage usually come to grief."

"And the Southerns are credited with excellent reputations for domesticity," he added, watching the air of caution return to her face.

"Are they?" she said simply.

"Yes; they are all warranted to go at any pace set by the lady on the box-seat."

She laughed with a semblance of amusement.

"Was Bertha called a bully, as well as her supplanter? Well, maybe she was one, but fate bullied her more than ever she bullied George, I should say."

"What induced him to marry her, mother?"

"Surely Cairo told you," she replied, with unexpected levity.

"I'd rather have your verdict."

"But I know nothing; I can only guess, like everybody else. I went out of their lives before the question was even mooted."

"I thought you stayed often at The Court."

"Only two or three times, and never with Bertha Venner. In fact, I never saw Sir George after he came into the title. The old baronet was my host on each occasion. He died very suddenly, you know, and only a few months before George's wedding."

"Cairo says that he was so down in the mouth at the old man's demise that Bertha and her mother had next to no

trouble with him."

Again Gwendolen laughed.

"Did they speak of me?" she inquired, after a time.

"Not under any name I could recognize, mother; but they spoke of my grandfather."

"What did they say of him?"

"That his luck at cards was-phenomenal."

"Anything else?"

"That he taught Sir George-the elder-to play piquet."

"Was that all?"

"Yes; and it was this reticence, added to an air of wisdom, that enlightened me as to his profession."

"You are calling him a cheat?"

"No; that's a term connected with detection. I call him a clever man; he evaded the law, which is more than most of the ingenious do."

Again she controlled the impulse to argue, and looked away into the budding hedgerows, as if seeking a happier idea than the one he presented so indifferently.

"So the gentlemen played cards; and the ladies, mother-

what did they play?"

"There were no ladies," she answered patiently, "except dear, plump Mrs. Meadows, and she made jam and potpourri."

"Dull for you, wasn't it?"

"Oh no; I was a child—at least the first time, and I found all sorts of playfellows in the beautiful house. There were puppies and ponies, and an old library for wet days, with an old librarian in charge of it, like an ogre in an enchanted castle, only he was an amiable ogre; and there were the two sons of the house, George and Henry, and they were very kind to me."

She regarded him now with complete serenity.

"You are going to see these people for yourself—their children, at least,—and that will be far more amusing for you than listening to my old and rusty impressions. Bertha and Mrs. Fawcett will be there to represent the past, and Alva, Peter, and Griselda to stand for the present. There is no doubt which you will find the most interesting."

"I want the past," he explained, "as an illuminator of

the present; history and heredity count for a good deal."

"I don't believe it, Anthony. Modern idea goes the other way, and I go with it. We are reconstructed every seven years, and it's only the people we live with who infect our habits and ideas. It's only the original Adam and Eve who crop up here, there, and everywhere. But it isn't a day for argument; and see, here are the four cross-roads with a carriage on each of them. All the county is going to the wedding."

Anthony allowed himself to be drawn into trivial speculation concerning the identity of liveries and faces, for he was by no means indifferent to the attention he and his handsome mother might be expected to attract in this fashionable assembly. He found various members of his foreign ac-

quaintance filling the aisle of the church, and he quickly became aware that Gwendolen's appearance was augmenting his claim to distinction. From familiar and unfamiliar voices he caught whispers of approval and curiosity—in fact, the tall, white-haired lady in her lilac gown threatened to turn the tide of public interest away from the central figures of the occasion; even the chief bridesmaid was caught staring at her when she should have been preparing to relieve the bride of her sheaf of lilies. But the important knot was tied without any more serious hitch than this. Alva Isabel Emmaline took Peter Wilbraham with graceful acquiescence, and Peter Wilbraham took Alva Isabel Emmaline with scarcely concealed fervor. As the pair came down the aisle together, after the signing of the register, they struck, at all events, a fine note of color—she white and pink and gold, he dark and eager; her eyes for the ground, with just a hint of satisfaction and expectation emanating from the lowered lids; his for her alone. They drove away with more than the common accompaniment of cheers, and the crowd of fashionable and unfashionable well-wishers broke up; the first to make their way to Mrs. Fawcett's reception, the second to invade the local railway station, or the route to it, to catch a last glimpse of the happy couple.

Anthony found this reception dull. His old acquaintance seemed to him nothing more than a repetition of their original selves—a reprint badly executed. Not only were the same remarks made, but they were made in precisely the same manner, with the same air of boredom. In his late period of solitude he had amused himself by dissecting the possible and probable ingredients that go to the formation of these so-called social lights and leaders, and had reduced the sum to a very common denomination.

After stifling a yawn or two, testing a nature or two, he contrived to make his way, not without difficulty, first to the half-deserted terrace immediately below the house, and then on to the wholly deserted rose-garden below it. It was too early for roses, but there was a wealth of young green out, and, from a wooden seat, he could look down

to the orchard, where the blossom was pink, and the sea behind a vivid and entrancing blue.

Producing a cigarette, he proceeded to inhale its excellent flavor, while he mused in a self-satisfied but rather weary fashion over his own position in the midst of this trivial throng. He recalled the challenging glances of pretty women, the cordial or confidential hail of stiffly elegant young men or pompous old ones, and, curling his short upper lip, smooth as that of a boy, he blew rings of smoke into the still air, and watched them fade into it. Thus, he decided, did the movements of these social forces form and fade, each a replica of the last, each void of any grain of matter competent to leave upon the atmosphere a permanent impression; for these men and women in their gala dress it was certain he had no use. But a rustle of silk skirts called him abruptly from his melancholy reverie, and he found the inattentive bridesmaid at his elbow.

She gave him no time to dictate the terms of their intercourse.

"You are the son of the beautiful mystery in lilac silk."

"Is it an accusation?" he said, rising and throwing away his cigarette.

"It's a congratulation, of course, unless she's only an effect."

"You want the cause behind it—I'm tracking patiently,

but I've not yet discovered it."

"You're accusing me of impertinence," Griselda said, as coolly as he himself had spoken; "but I've been accused of that fault so often that it doesn't worry me, and I'm sure that crowd"—she waved her hand in the direction of the house—"is enough to drive anybody into indiscretion."

"Is it indiscreet to talk to me?"

"Well-it's a breach of etiquette."

"Then it will have to be explained, won't it?"

She looked away towards the orchard and the sea, and a dimple appeared at the corner of her red mouth.

"I think it explains itself, Mr. Glover; it's a provocative

sort of day."

"If it provokes you into my neighborhood I can't complain."

"There are days," she added, still disregarding him, "on

which one has to trespass."

"And I represent something forbidden?"

She looked at him, but with rather a disparaging air.

"I should have liked to pitch my cap over a bigger wind-mill, but there wasn't one in sight; and I overheard Mrs. Quinny quarreling about you—society quarreling, you know—with Lady Faversham, and I remembered we hadn't been introduced, and—so—I came."

"I'm not much of a windmill; still, I do move, if there's

wind enough."

For a moment she looked nervous, then she shook off the restricting emotion with a laugh, and seated herself on the wooden bench.

"Sit down, Mr. Glover, and tell me if you went to see the presents."

"No; is there anything unusual amongst them?" he

asked, taking the place she indicated so cordially.

"There's a black pearl," she explained, with subdued excitement; "it's set in an old-fashioned ring, and it came without a name."

"That's odd," he allowed; "we don't send much these

days without a card attached."

"And it has some writing inside. I borrowed the microscope mama and I sent together (twelve-and-sixpence—at a sale in Regent Street—but don't tell), and I found 'Ne cede malis'; something to do with misfortune, isn't it?"

"'Do not yield to misfortune," he said, and laughed;

"not very complimentary to the bridegroom, eh?"

"It's nothing to do with Peter; it's an old ring, with an old story hidden in it. Alva hasn't had much spare time to speculate about it, but she will by-and-by. Marriage must be an awful nuisance," she added meditatively.

"Are you undertaking it this year?" he asked.

"No; but, of course, I shall undertake it some day."

"Of course," he echoed, and brought a first flush to her cheek.

"What has gossip been saying about me?" she inquired hotly.

"Nothing outrageous; only that you are the girl who

should have been a boy."

"So you knew me all the time; yes, I'm Griselda Southern, and you're Anthony Glover—you see, I know your first name."

"It's entirely at your service."

"Thank you," she retorted, without embarrassment. "I always prefer first names; they save time and trouble, and we haven't too much time, have we?"

"Not to-day, perhaps; but I recognize two kinds of opportunities: the ones that are given us and the ones we

take. I prefer the latter."

"You mean you want to make further acquaintance with me," she answered directly. "I suppose the days are long and dull in that queer house of yours; I've ridden past it. You've a father, haven't you? not quite as good to look at as your mother."

He thought to trace the source of this malicious air, and he met it equably. He fancied that she came to him raw from some repulse to her impetuous nature; there was restlessness—there was repressed passion in her. Handled cautiously, she might be counted on, he believed, to expose some of those very traits which the company above seemed to be void of.

"The days are very long, and the house is very dull and queer; how queer you can hardly imagine, till you've been inside, Griselda. And my father—well—as you say, he is not quite so good to look at as my mother."

"Poor Anthony!" Her bright eyes softened.

"You little know how poor," he said in his softest tones; in touch with none, while you—you have only to put out your hand and turn an acquaintance into a friend—a friend into a lover."

"That may be true," she answered with startling pas-

sion; "but what does the lover turn to the moment I take

my hand away?"

She looked at him, but it was plain she saw something less suave than his face, and with a thrill of exultation he realized that this chance shot had brought down the very quarry he had scented and so ardently desired. She was angry, outraged, young and reckless. It was not chance that had tempted her to invade his solitude; it was pique, and pique may be turned to many uses by the man of level pulses.

"I can't think," he said mendaciously.

"Then I'll tell you; he turns into a judge—a school-master—into everything that's unkind, unfair, detestable."

"Must be a fool, or a blind man," he commented.

"No, you're wrong; he isn't either. But he lives by rule; he talks down too much, and from—oh, so far away!"

"There's no ring," said her companion, looking at the

two bare hands clasped tightly in her lap.

"Oh, no; he's superior to common symbols."

"Marriage without wooing," he murmured softly, musi-

cally, and saw her eyes fill with tears of self-pity.

"Such cold letters!" she explained, more to the sweet spring day, it seemed, than to him. "I open them so eagerly; I could give so much, and—he doesn't want it. He wants what I haven't got—deportment and grammar and control. When I touched him he forgot to want these stupid things; but there it is, you see—I've the power to take and not to hold."

"I think the gentleman deserves a more definite form of punishment than we are according him," the young man ventured. "Suppose we bring a flavor of audacity into the occasion by introducing a name."

She frowned suspiciously at him.

"It takes courage," he added, "to produce names."

"Are you sure courage is the right word?"

He laughed at the rebuff.

"No; I'm only sure of one thing-my own ability to ac-

cept argument without a grain of prejudice. Never mind the name—I don't want it; tell me, instead, how long the gentleman remains at the end of his pen."

"I don't know; it may be only months and it may be years. There's a brother with an incurable disease—oh!——" She stopped in dismay, but he smiled reassur-

ingly.

"We've all got incurable diseases of a kind, physical or mental; don't fancy I'll locate him—I don't want him located. Why are you so nervous? You've seen my home; you've recognized it for what it is—a haunt for ghosts and shadows. You've recognized me too for what I am, or your instinct wouldn't have followed me. I'm no more than a man in fiction; I'm safe; I'm too egotistical to share any admissions you may make with anybody else. Why not let off steam by talking to me instead of risking the disapproval of more prejudiced persons?"

"That's how it struck me," she answered unsuspiciously; "it's so plain that you're not like the rest of us. A friend in fiction! that's what I wanted; to be a princess in a fable, just for an hour; to be told that everything I did was right; to get away from criticism and calculation. Why, I'm better already! indeed, I think I'm well again; now I can go back—it must be time if I want to help Alva change

her dress."

"But I haven't read the story of the princess yet," he objected. "You've only opened the book; you must come again and read to me out of it. Are you staying at The Court?"

- "Only for the wedding. We go to town to-morrow. I might have stayed here, in your neighborhood, too, funnily enough, if I'd wanted to, with an old governess; but she's such a donkey—kind, you know, but silly, and so I refused."
 - "Where does this ancient donkey stable?" he asked.
- "Not two miles from your ghostly residence; think of the irony of it!"
 - "I'll think of nothing so unprofitable. You must retract

that refusal. Headache, temper, the sudden spell of warm weather—anything will serve."

"But you're taking it for granted that I want-that I

wish-that-"

"I'm taking nothing for granted," he broke in; "that isn't desirable. You want a friend, a particular sort of a friend. Do you ride?"

"Whenever I get the chance."

"Capital; I've a cob you'll like. Plenty of spirit in him;

are you afraid?"

"Not of anything on four legs," she answered, looking at him irresolutely. "But there'll be the owner of the horse, and—and all sorts of wheels within wheels, and—no; that's the right answer, the only answer—no."

"I refuse to accept it," he said, encouraged by something in her expression; and, as though influenced by the vigor of

this refusal, she began to temper the negative.

"It's a pity—I should have liked the cob; and the old lady wants me very badly: she lives in Lapwing Lane—the little, red bandbox of a house at the end farthest from you. Not that it matters, because I can't come—I shan't come."

"But I can, and shall, Griselda. Every morning I shall bring the horses to the corner of that lane, on the off-

chance that you may have changed your mind."

"Have you got a side-saddle?"

"A beauty."

"Then how ridiculous the cavalcade will look." But there was irresolution still beneath the layer of scorn.

"I don't mind ridicule, Griselda."

"And I don't mind a little incense to my vanity," she flashed out, and fled up the steps and back to civilization

and its demands upon her.

He sat on for a while, then made a languid way back to the house in time to see the bride depart. He made no further effort to speak with Griselda, though he was conscious of her eyes upon him more than once.

It was to the bewilderment in which he hoped to have set her that he trusted. The vaguer, the colder his image, the more hope—so he argued—that her female curiosity would follow his late invitation. Plainly she had been left to the doubtful wisdom of her own immature nature; and the unknown played a dangerous game, when one took into consideration the age and temperament of the lady round whose finger he had forborne to set the circle of possession.

CHAPTER IX

GRISELDA LEAVES THE BEATEN TRACK

It was the morning but one after Alva's wedding, and Anthony rode a fine chestnut in the direction of Lapwing Lane. At his side ambled a gray cob, with a side-saddle, protesting prettily at the leading rein to which he had been attached.

The young man enforced a walking-pace, partly because it gave him pleasure to tyrannize over the spirit of his impatient pair, partly because he was early and had the cud of agreeable thoughts to chew. The topmost one was Griselda's note of recantation received that morning, and its brief phrases lingered in his memory, linking themselves with certain other reminiscences, pushed, of late, considerably into the background of his mind.

The day was sunny, even a degree warmer than the two preceding ones, and there was a perceptible increase of green in the hedgerows since he had driven with his mother. It was assuredly a day of relaxation, for mental license, and its spell induced him to submit to—at least, to be reminded of—the single magnet to which his boyish fancy had, long ago, succumbed.

Gwendolen would, indeed, have been surprised had she guessed the tenor of his thoughts, had she guessed that he had once been almost as familiar as herself with the old house in which Griselda was born. He could have recalled—in fact he was at that same moment recalling—a long series of intrusions into it. There was a special window, dear from illegitimate use, through which, times out of number, be had climbed to adventure. He knew the Long Gallery by moonlight; he had scampered, with startled

mice, to shelter before the creaking advent of lawful guardians of the place. From behind long strips of dust-impregnated tapestry, whose sacred antiquity he had tampered with in order to provide himself with peep-holes, he had marked the scared faces of puzzled domestics, lured by some careless sound, and enjoyed their whisper concerning spectral visitors. His boyish demand for consequence had been pampered by many a triumph fascinatingly tattooed by danger, and detection had as often as not only been averted by the exercise of phenomenal powers of ingenuity. Once he had left a shoe as witness of his earthly quality; once he had twisted an ankle over the shrubbery wall, in a too hasty retreat before an investigating bull-dog, and, unable to reach his secreted bicycle, had spent a damp and uncomfortable night under a hedge.

But there was a memory to connect him more closely than these with the girl he was going to meet. More than once he had contrived to make his way on to the roof of the house. He had discovered, in a happy hour, the flight of steps cut by the Southern children in the wall, and he had mounted by them, his act of trespass concealed by the buttress cutting so opportunely that portion of it from the view of persons in the garden. Once, and once only, he had come across a fellow-adventurer, a girl sound asleep, with her head half buried in the hollow of her arm. All the same he had recognized her for the visitor who, but for her sex, would have played the mistress of the house. At her feet lay her neglected book of fairy-tales, and for a long time he stared down into her unconscious face. For a long time he forgot to note that the storm, which had been threatening all day, was imminent; only when the lightning began to wink at frequent intervals did his musing take a definite form. Suddenly it occurred to him that this child would make an excellent center-piece to the coming exhibition of natural passion. He began to long to see the terror flame into her passivity, and, with but little hesitation or delay, he made his plans. He found the door by which, apparently, she had come up, and locked it, putting the key into his pocket for future use. The storm should wake her. The storm should startle her into proving or disproving the validity of that air of resolution he had thought to trace upon her half-hidden face. With infinite caution he climbed down to the garden, and made his way to a summer-house, from which the portion of the roof he meant to examine must be visible. He reached his place of observation and shelter exactly as the storm broke, and gazed eagerly up at the stage so carefully prepared. At her first movement up from the prone position in which he had left her, she was bound to come into view; but, though he watched until the storm had passed completely over, she made no such movement. She had worsted his curiosity once, and as he rode to meet her he registered a vow that she should not do so a second time. Ten o'clock was the hour appointed; but, though the clocks were striking it as he arrived, he and his horses were kept waiting a full fifteen minutes. At the end of that time the thick hedge, which entirely concealed the house, was pierced by a head in a riding-hat, and Griselda looked out at him apologetically.

"I've had trouble with my old lady," she explained; "it's been a work of art giving her the slip. I persuaded her to alter the arrangement of her linen-cupboard, but she won't stay there long when she discovers I'm not beside her. I daren't use the gate in case she looks out of the window; if she saw you she'd have hysterics to a certainty. Goodness knows how I'm to get back into the house unseen; but sufficient for the hour, etc. Come and put me up; that

cob's in a hurry."

Slipping easily into her seat, she atoned to the animal for his wait, and her escort had his work cut out to catch her up. They passed The Monk's Revel at a canter, and, turning sharply from the main road, found themselves in a country lane, with a wide stretch of common running alongside. With the soft turf under his feet the cob began to lose his head, and his master, from a yard or two behind, called out a word of warning:

"It's riddled with rabbit-holes; get him into the roadway again."

"Too late, he's out of hand," his rider retorted with satis-

faction.

"You'll break your neck, Griselda."

"You mean, I'll break your horse's knees. I'm out for a holiday, and I refuse to remember risks; if this is destruction we're racing for, I feel like the little boy facing the peril of unlimited jam tarts—I feel disposed to say: 'Lor, what a jolly death!'"

For answer he increased the pace of his chestnut, and, choosing the side farthest from the road, it became possible for the heavier horse to compel the other inwards, until

both were established on reliable ground.

"You're not a bit what I expected," she said scornfully, when the cob had been reduced to comparative decorum.

"What did you expect, my pretty Griselda?"
"I didn't expect to be addressed like that."

"Is it the Christian name you cavil at?"

"Oh no. It's the adjective, and the pronoun in front of it."

"But you are pretty—you'd be mortally offended if I didn't think so; and as for the pronoun, it's equally true. You are mine for the moment; I've your face to look into, your mind to probe into. This early summer day, this span of country, seem to me an excellent stage; our two minds—yours uncommonly bold, picturesque, and impulsive; mine uncommonly free from prejudice—seem to me a pair of actors to whom everything is possible. What shall we enact? farce, comedy, tragedy? Only, remember it's all a play; no real blood, no real tears, only the luxurious semblance of grief. But remember, also, that there are plays so perfectly portrayed, with such wealth of charm and enthusiasm, that the memory of them never stales; it vibrates through a lifetime."

"That's just what I want, a fairy-tale; to charm away the cross thoughts in my heart; but if the memory of it is to vibrate for a lifetime you'll have to exert yourself. All

the magic will have to come from you. I'm the most earth-bound creature ever made; I call to fairy princes in the night, sometimes, but it's always for earthly pleasures. You're certainly unprejudiced; that's why I came to you, and—yes—I suppose I'm impulsive. When some one smites me on the cheek I always want to hit back."

"It's not the sort of cheek I should want to smite," he said tentatively, and watched a fuller consciousness of her

fancied wrongs inflame it.

She had been prepared to love and learn the man that fortune sent; but not in a cold schoolroom, under chilling glances and more or less veiled contempt. In touch with her, Dorset had succumbed; on paper he took his revenge for what he obviously regarded as a species of weakness. It was not that he retracted or drew any lines of divisionon the contrary, he accepted the seriousness of their bond; but he lectured, he insinuated good advice, and the sensitive girl, not at ease with her conscience, read into his letters a recoil from what she did not hesitate herself to call "the Venner qualities." She belonged, she told herself miserably, to an hour and an influence; he belonged to a carefully trained personality, whose single lapse from sanity alone connected it with herself.

She was in her "teens" and she must have an hour or two of self-expression. She must speak to some one, she must question some one; and this precocious youth, only a year or two her senior, promised to companion and enlighten her desperation without interfering—so she fancied -with any of her deeper emotions.

Shaking off her harsh memories, she smiled at him.

"I shall forget the blow in half an hour, if you won't touch it. I'm all ready to be pleased this morning-in fact, I must be pleased. I'm not sure there's any need to talk, with so much to feel: the sun, the wind, the motion of this delightful horse. I'm not sure one doesn't talk the beauty out of things."

"Out of some things, yes; but there are others whose

beauty has to be talked into them."

"Not yet," she said with appeal; "wait till the charm fades a little."

For answer he pointed to the right with his whip. A quarter of a mile away the common dipped, and against the blue horizon-line Griselda could distinguish a group of figures.

"One hasn't to wait long," said he.

The figures were advancing rapidly, probably with the hope of succor. A ragged man walked first, a yet more ragged woman followed him, and three small children, raggedest of all, loitered in the rear. Griselda pulled up as the man came within speaking distance, and he embarked eagerly upon the customary formula.

"Of course they're hungry," she said, in answer to it,

"if you are always thirsty."

The fellow turned his drink-inflamed face away in anger

or chagrin, and the woman interfered on his behalf.

"We can't get no reg'lar work, miss; just odd jobs 'ere and there, tramping about after 'em, and a public-'ouse at each corner and 'is always feeling low."

Anthony put his hand in his pocket resignedly, but the

woman spoke again, quickly and impressively.

"It isn't money, miss, it's work we want. It's reg'lar work. 'E was never nothing but steady when 'e 'ad it, and maybe 'e will be again. Couldn't you find 'im some? 'E can tend flowers or 'orses or do odd jobs."

Griselda carried the question on to her companion, but

he was slow to reply to it.

"Work isn't easy to find for that sort."

"But you're a rich man, aren't you?" she inquired softly.

"I'm the son of a rich man."

"Isn't it much the same thing?"

"No; it's an entirely different thing. My father objects to finding employment for me, chiefly on account of the expense entailed; he won't be disposed to find it for an idle vagabond."

"Then you refuse?"

"Not if the matter is of real importance to you."

"It is; I want these people to have another chance, but—" She stopped in some bewilderment, and he explained his mystic point.

"Then my father goes to the wall; there are ways of preventing wealthy and parsimonious parents from damn-

ing their immortal souls."

"You mean that I've asked you to do something rather

difficult, Anthony?"

"Exactly; but, as it happens, I should like the opportunity of doing something difficult for you, Griselda."

"It isn't for me."

"Oh yes, it is; that must be distinctly understood. Am I to do it?"

She turned her troubled eyes away, and looked out into the sunny stretch of country before her; then suddenly her smile returned, lawless and radiant, and, for a moment, disconcerting to his ingenuity. But he did not take long

to follow the way of escape she had found.

"If you please," she said boldly; and he understood that his lapse from taste had been turned to practical account. Plainly she saw herself absolved by it from the very obligation under which he had schemed to set her; but if she worsted him, she also pandered to his love of the exclusive, and he took with the rebuff the added value of the rebuffer, and proceeded to pay first costs without wincing. A quick mutually comprehending look was exchanged; then she moved forward, leaving him to deal with his new protégés. He gave names and addresses, pressed some silver into the woman's hand, promised that the people to whom he sent her would supply work and wage, and pursued by the puzzled gratitude of the ragged party, he followed Griselda.

"I thought you liked the surface of things," he

said.

"So I do, but—I could find the sermon in the stone. I don't want to go deep; I want to play a little longer; I've a right to—don't you think so?"

"An indisputable right," he answered warmly; "it's

my main quarrel with women that they are in too great a

hurry to accept unnecessary responsibilities."

"Your quarrel with women!" she mocked prettily; "why, you're only a boy yourself—twenty-one—twenty-two at most."

"I'm an exotic, though; I grew up in a forcing-house."

"Which reminds me," she broke in hurriedly, "of my old question: why is your mother so different from all others?"

"For ten years I've been trying to find out, but vainly."

"There's your father, of course——" she began, and stopped in confusion.

"What of him?"

"He's-well-he's different too."

"You mean, he's a deformity, Griselda?"

"Well, he's rather queer, isn't he?"

"Don't suppose I mind any correct statement of fact. Of course he's deformed; and to some extent, I suppose, he accounts for that unusual expression on my mother's face. Still, I fancy there's deformity of one kind or another in most families."

"Not in ours," she said rather proudly; and he laughed that soft, mocking laugh that had so little mirth in it.

"You can't be insinuating that there is?" she said

angrily.

"Insinuation is a waste of time. There's your mother," he said, pleased to have roused her into excitement again.

"My mother! What are you saying? A deformity? Why, she's beautiful—or she used to be—and everybody

admires her, and she goes everywhere."

"Oh, you're employing the word in its most restricted sense," he explained easily; "I'm using it in its widest. There's a deformity of the mind that society doesn't recognize, and I'm making something of an experiment in using it my way—that is, as a sort of dividing fence. You see, Lady Southern seems to me to stand outside a certain magic circle, in which, for longer than I could tell you, the Southern family have revolved—for me, at least,

with considerable attraction. Your name, Griselda, has always stood for something fine and apart—this strange mother of mine always speaks it on bated breath; now you must forgive me if I elected to regard you as a member of this fairy stock, rather than the daughter of a goodlooking woman of the world."

"Wouldn't it be disloyal to my mother to forgive you?"

she said with hesitation.

"That depends entirely on the code of morals under which you choose to live."

"You have to be very strong to choose your own code,"

she objected.

"And aren't you very strong?"

"No; only very curious. Just a bit too curious, I'm beginning to think."

"We'll reduce the pace, then," he answered reassuringly; "we'll talk of 'shoes and ships and sealing-wax, and cabbages and kings'-there's plenty to argue about even in a cabbage."

Without a trace of pique or disappointment he embarked upon desultory chat concerning the country through which they were passing. He could describe for her, not without picturesque color, the peculiarities of the land and the people who lived upon it; he could handle history, ancient and modern; he could even touch on superstition, and circle with a mysterious flame one or two of the white cottages, whose smoke rose from their tiny chimneys in innocent refutation of this link with the occult; -in sum, he offered the young pleasure-seeker the cup that cheers but just comes short of inebriating. More than once he led her to a suggestive or complex point, as though by inadvertence, and away again, as though in sudden recollection of, and respect for, her conventional limit.

At mid-day he called a halt, and pointed to the village at their feet. They were riding through a grove of pines on high land, and the horses were beginning to show signs of exhaustion; they had been ridden far, and at times fast. The air was crisp, the lady hungry. It was no difficult

task to persuade her to dismount and rest under the trees, while Anthony took his animals down to the village below and ordered some sort of impromptu meal to be sent up for themselves. Griselda murmured a few remarks concerning the anxiety of her old "caretaker," but it was plain they were not meant to rank as definite protests.

She eluded Anthony's effort to help her dismount, and

slipped to the ground.

The soft bank, with its far view and its sheltering arch of pines, was very seductive, and she sat and watched the horses slither a way down the steep pathway with lan-

guid enjoyment.

When they disappeared from view she lay back and blinked up at the patches of blue sky visible between the branches. Clouds sailed across them in soft, swift motion, making for that unknown borne so magnetic to the imagination of youth. Griselda sailed with them through æons of space, through summer seas of argument, through masses of problem too gentle to do more than hint at the atrocity of an answer.

Just when the world of fancy was beginning to pall, the young man reappeared, followed by a small boy and a big basket, which she roused herself to help unpack with an alacrity that denoted a healthy appetite.

CHAPTER X

TRESPASSERS ARE LIABLE TO BE PROSECUTED

THE young couple wasted no time in getting to work upon the food before them. While they are and drank, conversation was at a discount; and even when the pangs of hunger had been allayed, it was apparent that Anthony had no intention of hurrying his companion in any particular mental direction.

He allowed her to take the lead, and he laughed lightly but encouragingly at the childish sallies with which she elected to enliven the end of the meal. He was convinced that she would weary before long of her own levity and turn to him for the production of a more subtle relationship. He was equally convinced that there were undeveloped tracts of rich country in this youthful nature; and, though he had no intention of becoming a responsible landowner, he had every hope of making her cater materially to his amusement. When the basket had been repacked, when the empty wine-bottle had been set at a fair distance and gradually shattered to fragments by all the small shot within reach, Griselda threw herself down on the luxurious couch of pine-needles and looked at her companion with precisely the expression he had fore-visioned.

"What are you going to do to amuse me?"

"Shall I paint your picture?"

"If you're quite, quite sure it won't be a very common one."

"Let's risk it, Griselda. I see you like some glowing point in a neutral landscape—a candle, we'll say; and though a candle's made of common wax, wax may be molded into any shape. You may be anything or nothing; you may burn or you may go out."

"I must burn," she exclaimed; "you're to suppose me

in full flame. Now what do I reveal to you?"

"It's all very dim and uncertain," he replied; "I'll have to come rather close if I'm to decipher the revelation. Ah, that's better! I begin to see—people and events, deeds of daring and deeds of folly. But nothing is definite: all the figures form and fade again; now you're growing, brightening, expanding; you're Eve, the mother of all—and now you're nothing but a specter wrapped in mist—a virgin goddess, a pretty tradition, of no more value than the bubbles in a child's clay pipe."

There was a blend of interest and distaste in her look

up at him.

"And what did you hope to gain by persuading me to ride with you?" she managed to inquire with tolerable

equanimity. "The answer to the riddle?"

"No; the riddle's long, and only time can answer it. I believe, Griselda, that I was inspired by the sub-conscious hope that I should persuade you to fall in love—not with me, but with my divergence from the usual type."

She laughed with unmistakable relief and gaiety.

"And shall I tell you what induced me to accept the invitation? I had the self-conscious hope that you would fall—not in love, of course, but fathoms deep in interest in me. It's Greek meeting Greek! What a waste of faculty!"

"But why debar me from falling in love?" he asked.

"That's a big question, Anthony. I can feel the answer, but don't know that I can express it. Love is something that rushes into you, but the door must be open, and—I think—I think all the doors in your nature are shut and locked. You're cold and yet you're intelligent; you know all about the human emotions, but you go your way quite independent of them. And now I've got the word I've been groping for—you're disconnected; you can't love or hate, or be frightened or happy; you can talk of all these states, but you don't belong to any of them. Oh, it's horrible! you're a dead man in a living body, and I'm afraid of you

and sorry for you. I feel there's something wrong in talking to you, but it fascinates me, like holding communion with—with——"

"An evil spirit," he finished; and she nodded, half in

apology, half in defiance.

Not ill-pleased to stand to her imagination as an intelligent bogey he saw fit to change the subject with brusquerie.

"Look over there," he said, pointing far across the valley. "You can see the chimneys of your first home, if you've

tolerable eyesight."

"My old home!" She followed the direction of his

pointing finger with an air of complete mystification.

"We've been riding inland, making a slow sweep round to the west; and if we suppose ourselves at the top of an irregular triangle, we'd have The Monk's Revel for the middle and most eastern point of it, The Court for the bottom one. You can now reckon out roughly the distance between the two houses—a matter of eight miles or so."

"Yes, but you never came to The Court. Peter told

me that."

"Peter is wrong. I went often, but at unusual hours. Perhaps I ought to add that I was entertained, like the proverbial angel, unawares."

"You stole in at night!" she gasped; "but what could

you possibly want?"

"Not the tea-spoons," he assured her, "but there were plenty of other valuables which the law doesn't recognize, to purloin. There was the joy of mastership, to begin with, Griselda."

"The joy of pretended mastership, you mean."

"Well, it's all the same to a certain age and a certain

temperament."

"Oh, I wish I'd caught you, Anthony! I wish I'd made you feel uncomfortable and in the wrong, even though you were only a boy!"

"Do you think you would have been able to? Remember, if I was a small boy you were a still smaller girl, and

I was disconnected, even in those days, from many of the common human sensations. But I'm not so sure we didn't meet. Did you ever stray on to the roof?"

"Sometimes."

"And what did you see from it?"

"Let me think! Acres and acres of country that ought to have been mine; cows and sheep and horses that ought to have been mine too—the roof was rather irritating sometimes, but not always. Sometimes I saw the things that nobody takes away: the sunlight and the blue sky and the birds—the wild ones that sing so deliciously. There were days all green and gold, and misty days, and dark blue days, and sometimes a black day, when the sky seemed to be closing in on me. I remember one in particular: there was thunder, and there were flashes of lightning, and rain coming down in bucketfuls."

She stared past him, her eyes riveted on that storm of

long ago.

"You were frightened?" he asked, almost with eagerness.

But she shook her head.

"Of course not. It was glorious; and I stood in the very middle of the glory, or rather I lay in the middle of it, for the storm-god woke me out of my sleep, and at first I thought I was in the palace of the genii out of the Arabian Nights, which I had just been reading about. But presently I understood where I was, and lay as still as a mouse (it was a very wet mouse in the end) and looked at the wonderful panorama. At first it was beautiful, more beautiful than anything I had ever seen, but by degrees the beauty turned to horror. I saw the oak-tree in the round field struck clean in two, after a hundred years of service; I saw the terrified horses scamper from one end of their meadow to the other, neighing their terror and their sense of help-lessness; there was magic in the air, but it was cruel magic."

"You were frightened," he said again; but again she

contradicted him.

"Not for myself; there was nothing to be frightened of."

"But the roof was exposed; why should not the elements

choose you for a victim?"

"They couldn't. You see, the lightning conductor was at the other end of the roof; and if the storm-god came near enough to be dangerous, he would be forced to run down it and away into the earth. I had learnt that much in my schoolroom."

"Ah, then all my ingenuity was wasted."

"But what could your ingenuity have to do with my storm, Anthony?"

"I can't pretend to have invoked the storm, but I chose

your position in regard to it."

"But that's impossible. I went up of my own free will, with my book of fairy-tales, and I went to sleep; I never even saw you."

"Well, you chose the position yourself, but I fastened you to it, as Andromeda was fastened to her rock; only, unfortunately for my scheme of vengeance, you fell in love with the monster."

"Your scheme of vengeance!" she echoed in utter bewilderment.

"You were trespassing, Griselda, on my preserves. You had to be punished. Moreover, you looked very picturesque, curled up like a kitten among the chimneys. I wanted you for a center-piece to my picture; so I locked the door by which, obviously, you had come up, and I departed to enjoy the coming exhibition from a point of vantage with which I was familiar. But you outwitted me. Had you moved ever so little I must have seen you; but you lay still. Now, how in the world did you get down?"

"You locked me up there!" she answered fearfully; "you waited for the sight of my terror—the terror of such a little girl. How did I come down? By the steps in the wall, of course; they were cut years ago by my father and my uncle."

It was his turn to show some agitation.

"The steps in the wall—those clumsy steps, slippery,

too, after the deluge! Griselda, it was madness."

"It was less awful than what you did," she retorted. "It frightens me to think a boy could be so wicked and so pitiless; it frightens me that such a boy should grow into a man and come near me again."

Shuddering, she looked away from his pleasant, passive face, out into the green land below, and he smiled to him-

self.

He had decided by this time that it was useless to appeal to her gentler fancies; these had been appropriated, he felt convinced, by the man she would not name—the man who roused in her the restless spirit of rebellion. It was only to her curiosity he could trust for intercourse. This was disappointing; but what vanity lost, intellect gained: she was twice as instructive in her defiance as she would have been in amicable surrender.

"I've shocked you by my candor," he said softly, "and the other man has irritated you by his affectations. Now why rebel at these temperamental barriers to free intercourse? Why not climb boldly on to them, and enjoy the view from the top? Directly you admit an eccentricity in somebody else, you capture an outpost of more or less value. Suppose we leave the personal side of the question for a bit."

"I can't," she answered weakly; "I can only think of you standing over me in my sleep, planning to torment me."

He chose to affect a polite disdain for this profitless attitude of mind.

"Shall I tell you that years of remorse followed the incident?"

"No; because I couldn't believe you. I shall always

have to think of you as a beast."

"But an instructive beast," he reminded her. "A beast to whom you can tell your wrongs as you would tell them to the storm-god, as you call him."

"What makes you suppose that I have wrongs?" she

asked.

"Nobody comes to talk to me who is perfectly satisfied with the conditions of their life."

"Oh, poor Anthony!" she said, with a sudden drop to pity; "nobody to play with, nobody to talk to, but the sour

and the unhappy."

"The price of disconnection," he answered lightly. "I don't grudge it; but why do you always wince at every crude statement of fact? Why do you flutter so distractedly between the desire to talk to me and the desire to repulse me?"

"I've told you already. I want your secrets, your knowl-

edge of life and people, but I don't want you."

"Am I to be silent, then? Speak the word, and I'll

turn over and take an after-luncheon nap."

"I ought to say 'yes,' and I can't," she whispered, still watching him with that air of anxious fascination. "I know so little and you know so much."

"Suppose you trust my discretion, then?"

"I'm afraid I'm going to; I'm afraid I must."

Anthony decided to make his point in a roundabout fashion.

"You shall tell me nothing with reluctance. I'll talk, and you shall listen. It's my party, and it's my duty to

amuse you."

"Oh," she exclaimed with relief, "that's nice of you! Show me another picture—not my own, this time; I'm tired of myself. A foreign picture, big enough and beautiful enough to fill this frame."

She indicated with her hand the wood in which they lay, and the arch overhead; then she pressed a handful of the pine-needles to her face, inhaling their pungent scent with

delicate appreciation.

"It's rather a vast frame, Griselda."

"That's why I give it you," she said flatteringly.

"There are so many images with which I could fill it. I wonder—I wonder which of them would please you best? They must be beautiful and happy, I suppose?"

"And good," she added, on a breath of anxiety.

"But what is goodness, Griselda?"

"Oh, I don't know. I wish—I just wish we were a pair of clouds sailing across that strip of blue sky; then I might go with you wherever you pleased."

"But we shouldn't feel," he objected languidly, "and all

the glory of liberty would be wasted."

"So it would. A pair of squirrels, then"—she brought her glance to earth again, but not to him. "They have sensation without speculation; the only good and bad to worry their minds lies in the virtue of a nut."

"Ah, but if speculation shadows the bright day, you mustn't forget that it serves to illumine the gray one.

Would you really choose to be mindless?"

"No," she said with resolution; "I'll be brave. Show

me your picture."

"In a minute," he said, with an unusual degree of animation. "There are quite a number in my memory, with their faces to the wall: which shall I turn? The Venetian night?-no-too much water and too little motion; an English cornfield?-too near home; Norman peasant life? Egyptian sphinxes?—all too placid. But what's this? A dancing-girl-Italian-almost as vivid as when I saw her last-she'll do; you can but hiss her from the stage if she doesn't dance to your liking. We draw a circle round her -thus; we call it a magic circle, because the word is like the striking up of an orchestra: it sets our minds in tune with the tale to come. She moves so fast that we see nothing of her features; she flashes such a sudden wealth of color that we catch no single one—we secure no more than an intoxicating effect. She's blue, and red, and gold; she's brown and pink; her sash, her hair, her twinkling feet, her jaunty cap make half a thousand assertions to the minute; she is all wires and malice, all fun and fury; she has a myriad aspects, and each is a harmony. We dance with her, willy-nilly, and all the prosaic everyday ideas fly into the limbo for forgotten feelings. She rages with royal exuberance and mystic evasion of any hint of real passion; and, when the flurry reaches, not the moment

of satiety, mind you, but the one preceding it, there comes a pause, sacred to astonishment. The flying force of the past moment stands immovable; even her features, visible at last in all their dainty graciousness of aspect, have contrived to banish every trace of emotion. Nervous seconds pass—a dozen of them; then the orchestra breaks out again, softly, fitfully, into the next variation of the theme. Slowly the dancer's face begins to accept expression. Slowly it begins the translation of those mysterious, musical phrases throbbing monotonously upon the silence. The meaning flickers across the lowered lashes, flickers and goes out, to reappear, a moment later, at the corner of her mouth; it flits from one feature to another, goes out again, leaving her the statue that life has invaded and deserted, but will, presently, inevitably invade again. The music speaks volubly now, and the phrases have a distinct, a subtle story to betray; like matches they flame up and die down, always about the lovely stillness of that face, until one, happier or bolder than the rest, lights on inflammable stuff, and the sacred fire is burning-here, there, everywhere. The white arms rise above the head, and the curves of chin and throat are revealed; there is a sparkle of gay skirts, and our dancing-girl is once more in motion, but it is new motion and no echo of the last. This is the tale of suppression, this is the sleeping strength of the forest-tamer; the languor is untouched by any suggestion of weariness or incapacity it is the deliberate exposition of passivity. And to the weird call of it each human weakness throbs an answer: for the evil mind there is evil thought, artistically dressed to enable it to pass the stern guardians of our morals; for the innocent there is the strain of music we heard long ago in the foolish days of childhood; for the ascetic there is that strange assertion of restraint, of purpose held in a leash; and for the critic, pure and simple, there is technical perfection. The girl is an adept in her art: her short curls dance with her, the light turns them to gold or brown as it turns warmth or pallor into her beautiful face; she is a slave and a sorceress, a spirit and a woman. She is no

more mine than is the heaven above, but she gives to me and all who consent to watch her the only tangible answer to those myriads of questions that connect us with the elusive powers of our universe. Touching her, with a more or less daring finger, one finds oneself in contact with a stream of electricity; one lets go, and the common round has a very common look. One tries to analyze, to discriminate; one calls the faces of one's womankind by varied names: sisters, wives, sweethearts—but appreciation of these distinctions has been seduced; the line has been drawn differently."

"You don't leave much room for religion," she said; but

her accent was not quite as antagonistic as her words.

"I leave the religion of universal tolerance and it travels lightly. What's prejudice, I ask you, but a heavy box on a traveler's back?"

With an effort she turned from him and lay back, locking her arms behind her wind-loosened hair, looking up at the patch of blue sky visible between the branches of the pines.

"I think religion is learning to do without things," she said steadily; "it's learning to give them up to others, even though others don't seem any more deserving than ourselves."

"And the person one endows?" he said quietly. "Don't you give with one hand and take away with the other? Don't you, according to Bible philosophy, strip him mentally when you clothe him bodily? Don't you take the

'better part' yourself by inverse calculation?"

"There are people, Anthony Glover, who have got left behind," she explained laboriously, "either by bad luck or bad management; they haven't anything to give until we take pity on them and endow them; then by slow degrees the pressure comes on to them too, and they learn to denude themselves for others still weaker and smaller. At least, that's the only way I can handle religion."

"It's a very praiseworthy way," he allowed amiably, but a trifle slow; it does very well for the mentally re-

stricted."

She flushed a little and brought her eyes back to his calm face.

"Don't you understand that I'm being cautious, not stupid?"

"But caution indicates the presence of danger; what

are you afraid of?"

"I don't know," she answered, with a collapse into her

old attitude of nervous curiosity.

"Of anything that's vital, it seems to me, Griselda. Now I couldn't take you into danger however much I wanted to, because there's no bond of sentimental sympathy between us. I can only take you into a little sincerity of argument. Won't you come? It's a land the law doesn't tamper with; a gentle inclination lets you in or out. Do you suppose there is nothing we discontented people can't teach you impulsive, optimistic ones? Do you suppose there is nothing to hunt in this world but a suitable husband? Can't you trust me to consider your weaknesses as well as your strength?"

"There are a thousand things I want to know," she said quickly, "if you'd promise to be careful; only—only all the most interesting ones are round a particular point, and that's the very point my instinct tells me not to approach

with you."

"Love," he said easily. "But love is not a point, it is an overflow. I should dearly like to teach you the art of breathing under water, but I'm afraid it's one we can only teach ourselves. You see, you don't want to breathe: you want to go down into the suffocating sweetness; you want the death that feels like sleep; you want me to stand by and watch you follow the disastrous way of the herd, but I can't do it. For you there's arbitration; there's the stuff in you that need not—that ought not—to succumb. Keep that invisible ring of yours; it has its uses and its pleasure, but wear it with a reservation none but the similarly enlightened can possibly suspect."

"I don't know what you mean. What could I keep

back?"

"What I'll explain to you by degrees, Griselda, if only you won't be quite so childishly suspicious—if you'll ride with me again to-morrow, and the next day, and the next. I can tell you much that your prejudiced friends have kept to themselves. Surely you're not a coward?"

"No," she said, retreating before his nearer approach, "I'm not a coward, and it can't be wrong to learn oneself and other people a little. I'm so ignorant that I get hurt by looks I don't understand and words that sound strange and cold. How can it be wrong to learn the truth?"

"How indeed? And you mustn't fancy that this knowledge makes any great difference in your life; you can still take the way that's profitable—only, you take it with your eyes open."

"I want to understand the minds of people who care very much for the conventions," she said; and he concealed his

chagrin at this unconscious tribute to his rival.

"Oh, they're the A B C of the study. You can learn the length and the breadth of them in an hour. There's scarcely time to-day, perhaps—the horses will be here directly—and it's a study that mustn't be interrupted; but there's to-morrow."

Again she winced before the access of eagerness in the face so close to her own.

"To-morrow?—I'm not quite sure."

"Oh yes, you are. Give me the promise, and I'll set the seal."

But the chance phrase, the audacious movement forward, broke the spell that held her; with his loss of entire serenity he lost his peculiar influence. The closeness of her face, the intensity of it, proved a little too strong even for his steady pulses. He had overshot his mark, for he had brought back to her memory another form of the impulsive feeling he had so unexpectedly betrayed. She had seen the stable-yard on a shadowy winter afternoon; she had heard again the click of the bit in the mouth of a tired horse; she had felt again that odd leap in

her breast as she sat looking down into the dark face below, and she understood, in the moment left to her for the protection of her honor, that an immeasurable gulf lay between the emotions on which these two men played. The first had approached her honestly if roughly, generously if patronizingly; such hands, such faces one could meet without injuring the essence of which temperament was composed. Like lightning these saving thoughts flew to the defense of the situation, and as swiftly her hands flew to her face, just in time to receive that detestable seal on the back of one of them. Quick as she had been to repulse, he was little less quick in his acceptance of the rebuff.

"You're perfectly right, Griselda. Such seals are ridiculous; in theory I discarded them long ago, but habit dies hard."

She tried to find an answer, but to his inward satisfaction there came to their ears the sound of approaching footsteps. The horses were coming up from below, and Anthony moved away to look down towards them, aware that her first utterance would probably be dangerous to his project.

She scrambled to her feet and picked her hat and whip from the ground. There was repressed passion in every

slight movement, and it sought an outlet.

The chestnut was showing temper as he scrambled up the steep incline, and his master went a little way to meet him and relieve the groom in charge. Griselda looked sharply at the fellow as he approached.

"I'll mount there," she said with rare ungraciousness,

and pointed to the stump of a felled tree.

The hostler was capable of recognizing and resenting her accent; he was hot and exhausted after his climb and his wrestle with the vagaries of the two lively animals. He moved the cob into position, however, though he failed to keep it there; and after one or two ineffectual efforts to mount, Griselda ordered him to make her a stirrup. But here again he proved himself clumsy or unfortunate, and

she used an expression or two that might apply either to the man or the beast and were certainly far from flattering.

Losing the remnant of his patience, he took sudden and quite unexpected advantage of the relative positions of his two tormentors, and, slipping a grimy pair of hands round the girl's waist, he lifted her by sheer force into the saddle.

For an instant astonishment held her mute and immovable, the horse likewise; the hostler, mollified by the success of his venture, lifted a grinning face; but his satisfaction was of short duration. Griselda raised her ridingwhip and brought it down with an all too accurate aim; for an instant the two faces glared their mutual hatred, then the cob was off, and the man put up his hand to find a thin line of blood breaking the skin nearly the length of his right cheek. It was Glover who caught the full force of his expression, and with a low whistle, half of dismay, half of amusement, he put his hand into his pocket. But the injured groom would accept neither his money nor the consoling platitudes he produced on the idiosyncrasies of the other sex; he even refused the tip due to him for his services.

"I'll get even with the she-devil if it takes a lifetime," he muttered, and the young man was obliged to leave him to his vows of vengeance and follow the instigator of them.

He quickly became aware that the incident had served to carry the fire of her defiance from himself; but her mood, though friendly and flippant, was by no means easy to attach to his own purposes. He could extract no

promise of companionship for the following day.

"He was at liberty," she assured him gaily, "to bring his horses to the corner of her lane or any other lane on the off-chance of finding a friend;" but the mood of the morrow was as yet as profound a mystery to herself as to him. She wished him farewell with all the honors of victory in her demeanor, but he was disposed to think these flags a trifle too ostentatiously exposed to be quite convincing. On the whole, he fancied the morrow would give him agreeable occupation.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE ADVISABILITY OF DESTROYING ONE'S COR-RESPONDENCE

"IF only people would have the common-sense to put their letters in the fire directly they've read them, it would save the world a vast amount of trouble. I almost believe you dropped it on purpose."

Anthony laughed. His dismay was certainly tempered by the knowledge that the second repulse he had been offered was going to prove more unpleasant for the lady

than for himself.

He recalled his annoyance of that morning when he and his horses had spent a wearisome half-hour perambulating the road in front of the red pill-box, and without the satisfaction of ultimate triumph this time. The afternoon post had brought him a letter—a letter both disappointing and entertaininf; for it was possible to cull from it more than a refusal to ride with him. He could so easily recreate the moon of the night before, to whose influence the effusion undoubtedly owed its being. He could as easily recreate Griselda's enjoyment of her unnecessarily vigorous repudiation of himself. A truly ludicrous air of exaggeration inflamed the assertions of remorse, the determination to desist; and an ignorant peruser of the epistle would have been prone to read into it a confession of doubtful, if not criminal, amusement. It was impossible not to smile, inwardly at least; for this same letter, by the edict of fate, or by virtue of that long arm of the law we call coincidence, had slipped from the gaping pocket of his shootingcoat an hour or so before, as he strolled in the direction of Griselda's retreat, hoping to encounter her in a more amenable mood.

Discovering his loss, and failing to make it good, he had deemed it expedient to acquaint her with the fact, and she sat opposite him on the red rep sofa with an even greater air of distress than he had anticipated. The old lady was enjoying her afternoon nap, and there was no one to interfere with the examination of the culprit.

"Tell me again just where you missed it."

Patiently he re-embarked upon the tale.

"About twenty yards from your gate; I turned back at once and hunted everywhere, but without success. I didn't meet a soul until I came within sight of The Monk's Revel, and there I found our acquaintance of yesterday; he was lighting a pipe at the side of the road, with his bicycle in the hedge beside."

"You don't think he got off because he saw it?" she

asked wistfully.

"The chances are very much against such an idea."

"There was a high wind," she said in the same tone; "the letter would be almost certain to blow eastward into

the fields. That's the way the smoke is going."

"Of course, there would be the chance of an obstruction," he said; "it might stick in the hedge; but I shouldn't worry. Even supposing the fellow found it, even supposing he could recognize us under the names in it, I don't see how he could deduce any sort of information, damaging or otherwise, out of it. It wasn't written in the language in which any hostler would be versed."

"I wish you'd speak a little more confidently," she complained. "You say all the right things, all the consoling things, and yet—and yet—you manage to leave me with the uncomfortable impression that there might be trouble. The man was very angry still?"

"It was rather a sharp blow; disfiguring as well as pain-

ful. You can't expect him to forget quite so soon."

"You offered him money again and he refused it?"

"This is the third time of asking, Griselda; I've a good mind to provide a new answer."

"I know I'm fussy, but it was such a silly letter. I can't think what induced me to write it. Midnight oil, I suppose, or that moon I could just see behind the blind. If I'd only read it over in the morning I should have torn it up, but the girl saw it lying, stamped, upon my dressingtable, and took it down to give the postman, before I was properly awake. Some of the phrases are coming back to me, and they are too ridiculous. It was as if I confessed to a sail near the wind, and all the time we never moved more than an inch from the shore—now did we?"

"No, worse luck!"

"I was cross and curious; I wanted to learn a little—just a very little of what goes to the making of a man. You looked so cool and quiet, I thought you could tell me, just as a lesson-book or a fussy old professor would have told me. I thought you needn't count, but you came nearer than I meant—you startled me—you set all my feelings in a whirl. They wouldn't be calmed down until the day-light came, and then—the fatal letter had gone. And you're not sorry to have lost it. You're what I called you yesterday, disconnected; you're a man under a ban, and your only amusement is to try and draw others under it. You were a cruel and unhappy boy, now you are a cruel and unhappy man. I must forget you."

"You may forget, but will the other man forgive, supposing that fantastic tale of renunciation and regret comes into his hands? Oh, it's improbable, I grant you; it's next door to impossible; but—such things do happen. Truth is stranger than fiction, once in a blue moon, and it was a seductive blue moon that led you into temptation last

night."

"But you know as well as I do that there's nothing to

forgive."

"Of course; but my knowledge won't help you. I'm the one and only person whose evidence may not count in a court of law. Don't you see, my dear girl, you could have made as many mountains out of molehills as you pleased, if only you'd refrained from putting them into

black and white, with your seal and superscription at the bottom?"

She looked at him narrowly, a tinge of color coming back to her white cheek.

"Yes, I see that, but I also see that you're trying to frighten me. It's the only amusement you can get out of me now. You left me to the cruelty of that storm when I was a child; you want to leave me to the cruelty of another sort of storm; you want to see me cry and struggle. But I didn't show the white feather then, and I'm not going to show it now, not until there's a real need to, anyway. Now you can go away and save me the bother of explaining you to my old lady. She'll be here in a minute or two, and she's deaf and talkative, and is just starting a bad cold in her head."

He rose, accepting this summary dismissal without protest.

He recognized the truth in one of her assertions; there was no more to be got out of her. Habit induced him to alter his expression at the last. He took the hand she offered carelessly, and pressed it between his own.

"Why so much animosity, Griselda? I come and go at the word of command. I exercise what functions I possess. I'm no humbug, and if I'm disconnected from the common

source, you can hardly suppose it's from choice."

She was quick to recognize and answer this appeal.

"No. I'm sorry for you, or I would be if only I wasn't so busy being sorry for myself. I've got an uncomfortable impression that every crime, even a tiny thought-crime, gets punished one way or another; I wasn't very wicked, yesterday, but I wasn't perfectly loyal. Though I don't believe that letter will turn up and make trouble, I believe the thought of it flying in the wind for anybody to pick up and misconstrue will give me bad dreams for a long time. It's such a suitable punishment; it's so vague and difficult to define. Good-by, Anthony Glover. I can't see you any more. You've hurt me, but not dangerously; I've got away, and you must hunt elsewhere to-morrow. If I were

you I'd go to Italy; the dancing-girl will charm away the memory of my limit. She was very pretty, but some day the sacred fire will refuse to burn; the matches will fizzle and go out, your sorceress will scowl or cry like any detected fraud. Go back and wait for the day of disillusion."

"I never go back, Griselda. The fish in the sea are every bit as good as those that came out of it, and there are a great many more of them. My dancing-girl may burst like a South Sea bubble if she or the fates will, but I shan't be there to see. Good-by, since you will have an end."

"If the letter is found, if it comes back to you, you'll let me know," she said; and he turned in the doorway to enjoy a last look at the mark of anxiety he thought to have stamped on her youthful face.

"To be sure—if it comes back, Griselda."

CHAPTER XII

A CASTLE IN THE AIR

It was June when Alva arrived at her new home, after a tour on the Continent. The joy of tenants, as expressed by arches, mottoes, and the public consumption of beer, was distasteful to her, and Peter was compelled to forbid any form of demonstration.

That she provided disappointment to many never occurred to her. She was too deeply immersed in luxurious dreams connected with the coming life to pay any attention to such hints as her husband exerted himself to drop, and he could produce nothing weightier. He was "in thrall" as surely as was the unhappy knight in Keats's ballad: she chained him with sweet abstraction; she offered a complete and gracious acquiescence to all the lawful demands of life and she eluded a mental fusion so delicately that his mind, radically intolerant of subtlety, found itself disarmed and helpless.

To Alva herself, marriage had been the only door into a kingdom reserved for her from time immemorial. Her grandmother had stood for the jailer from whom she had stolen with difficulty stray snatches of liberty, chance breaths of the atmosphere of coming emancipation. She had been content to wait, to let the full flavor of future bliss mature slowly in the dark of temporary repression. But climax, she had just begun to realize, may arrive too late, as well as too early; and Peter and his goodly heritage were factors in the situation not to be ignored. Griselda had provided the last straw calculated nicely to break the back of reluctance, and the girl had accepted this husband with the name of sacrifice cleverly attached to him, as she

would have accepted a rose with its attendant army of thorns.

For a short time, indeed, she had attempted to give this pleasant and handsome companion a definite place in her castle of imagination; but the very generosity of his response to all tender overture ruined, very early, his own cause. He could deny her nothing, save reserve, and it was on reserve that the majority of her beloved fancies were nourished.

With a sigh, more for herself than for him, she resigned the idea of even partial spiritual connection. She gave him a multitude of sweet looks and kind responses, but, with an acumen he could not or would not express, he found himself forced to rank as an infant, tugging at her apronstrings, powerless to capture more than material attention.

Her fancy, after this experimental flutter, settled down to a rapturous speculation concerning the possibilities entombed in the old gray mansion towards which she was journeying. The honeymoon had spelt the last frail barrier between herself and the awakening so long delayed, so ardently desired. Vaguely she had looked upon the palaces of princes and the art-treasures of nations; for the moment there was no magic in values and effects so disconnected from her own personal scheme of interest—they merely served as figures for comparison; and it was with unconcealed eagerness that she turned her face to England and The Court.

But so fierce was her tendency to dally with pleasure, that on this June night it seemed to her that speed and light were enemies.

There was a moon behind the walls of her new home, and she would have had this road to triumph dark; she would have allowed no lights save the optimistic fancies in her breast. For her the pace of the well-matched pair of horses was unwelcome, and she could only thank her own determination that the motor Peter had sighed for had not been bought. She vowed it never should be bought. She would never rush with the moneyed mob to

the smell of dust and petrol. She liked and she meant to

move deliberately.

She lay back in her seat, scarcely conscious that her left hand lay inclosed in her husband's right, while, for him, this contact began after a time to spell a species of torment. It asserted so much that was false. He could not help but realize that his gods were not her gods—that she had classed them, weighed them, found them wanting.

There was ample time, during that long, steep journey upward to where the house stood out like some grimly beautiful Doré drawing, to accept multitudinous thoughts and impressions, and the two hearts were full—of vastly diverse matter. Holy priest and holy Book had pronounced them one, but neither priest nor Book could regulate the current of emotion bearing each nature in its destined way. To the woman this stream was pleasant, stimulating, full of promise; to the man it was an antagonistic force, which he strove vainly to curb, to turn into some happier and more generous channel than this dark one of jealousy.

"Our home," he said softly, and for a moment her look of exaltation set his pulse dancing; then it fell again in recognition of the nameless barrier between their two trans-

lations of the term he had invoked.

"You're happy, Alva?" he ventured again.

"Almost too happy, Peter."

"Why do you care so much for inanimate things?"

She could no longer ignore the animosity in his tones, and she turned her, full and smiling face to him.

"You're actually envious of your own house; you're actu-

ally angry with me because I come to it so willingly."

"Because I sometimes think the house and the name are more to you than I am. I don't care to be only the appendage, Alva."

Long thoughts floated up into the brown eyes regarding him, but no trace of embarrassment, and his sense of wrong

scuttled out of sight.

"Say I'm a fool," he said—"it's true enough; but you intoxicate me. I seem to be always pursuing you, never reaching you; you seem to belong so perfunctorily to love and marriage."

"You're not a fool," she answered equably; "but now and then you are rather foolish. Don't you see that the name and the house are part of you; that I take them all, I love them all? It isn't wise and it isn't kind to strike all these personal notes so persistently. We're factors of a great race, you and I, that has made its marks on history and must make more."

Her cheeks began to glow and her voice became eager; she sat forward in her seat, looking at the gray pile of stone above them.

"Our lives are to be written in with all those lives; the men and women in your Long Gallery go right back into the past, and through us, their influence is to be carried on into the far, far future."

"Oh, bother the Gallery!" he said impatiently; "it really

doesn't matter all that much."

"But it does, Peter. It expresses what individuals can't. Why won't you understand? Griselda understood, though she was only a baby. Those people can't be ignored—they have an influence; I felt it years ago, when I was a child myself. I came to The Court with granny, and I was sent out of the drawing-room, while the elders talked scandal, presumably; I found my way to the picture-gallery. At first I thought, like you, that they were only paint and canvas; but presently I saw the people behind the paint come out. They spoke to me, coldly and strangely; they frightened me, they made my heart thump with terror—there were so many of them and there was so very little of me. There was antagonism between us, founded long before; they hated, but they had to acknowledge me. I went away for years, and the memory slept. It came back with you, but not very vividly. Griselda roused the full tide; perhaps because her face was so like others that I recollected dimly. You brought me to The Court when we were first engaged, and

they were silent that time. It was the oddest, most eloquent silence, though; it was as though they shrugged their shoulders at me and my intrusion. I went once more alone, just before our wedding, and again their mood had changed. They were sorry for me; there were tears behind the pride in their painted eyes; a stream of sympathy flowed between us, bearing in and out the most fearful and extraordinary emotions and suspicions. Peter, it seemed to me that my body and my mind were snatched from me and twisted into a quantity of shapes; not even sex remained. Now I was a soldier, and I fingered steel; now a poet, and I fingered a slim gold pen, from which the sonnets flowed in a musical, effortless current; now I was the toy and now the lord of passion. Laughter and pain battled through me, as though my will were non-existent; I was connected with everything and controller of nothing. My face was a plastic mask, and fortune played with it as a child with a lump of clay. There were hundreds, thousands of us in that Gallery, cryingfighting for definition; struggling to make a personal and permanent mark, but in vain. Life, love, death—these were but names; we sang of them, we spoke of them, we made mock sacrifices for them, but we never, never experienced them. Even the black horses took us to no resting-place; we could neither live nor die; existence was nothing but a perpetual agonizing necessity for movement that had no end and no beginning."

"Alva, hush!"

With an effort she checked the excitement threatening to

master her, and looked at him with apology.

"You're right to silence me. These moods mustn't be encouraged. They don't come very often, but when they do they're unmanageable from inside. I was an only child, you know, and a lonely one, and these get into bad ways. We tempt 'the little men of the mountains' to steal us, and we come back 'fey,' with eyes for the mist only and the figures concealed in it. Minnie began the mischief—I was such a fish out of water in granny's pompous home; she used to tell me tales in the twilight or the firelight, and when she went

away I used to invoke her fairies for myself. You must forgive me; you must be patient with me, dear Peter; but oh! now you're hurting me; the rings are cutting my fingers under the glove. See, we shall be home directly."

In silence they performed the short remainder of the drive. It wound uphill, and as they approached the house a group of persons could be distinguished drawn up on the

front steps.

Apparently the house-servants were not to be defrauded of their right to a public reception. But Alva was too deeply immersed in the more intangible points connected with this home-coming to take serious account of this sudden claim upon her courtesy.

She accepted the hand extended to assist her from the carriage, and swept rapidly with far eyes through the line of

nonplused domestics, and on into the hall.

There she glanced about her with casual satisfaction at the armored figures, the wealth of barbaric weapons, the few but fine pieces of bronze and marble that adorned it, and made her way, quite unattended, to the main drawingroom.

In the doorway, however, a first premonition of mistake caused her to look back towards the hall, whence came the sound of voices. Peter was apparently accepting the overtures she had ignored; but in a minute or so he joined her, more angry than she had ever seen him.

"How did you dare?" he began hotly.

"Dare what?" she asked in some trepidation.

"Dare to hurt the feelings of every servant we possess. Some of them were here years before I came. First you set the tenantry by the ears, then these good souls; it's just a little too much, Alva."

She laid her ungloved hands upon his arm.

"I forget; I'm so in love with the whole that I don't consider the parts of it. And I'm not used to family retainers, you know. At granny's the maids came and went so fast I scarcely even knew their names. I'm truly sorry, and—I'll atone."

She waited for no reply, but hurried back to make her amends.

The antagonism on that row of faces she confronted appealed to her ingenuity, and it was a very disarming face

she offered for this second inspection.

"You must forgive my passing you all just now. I couldn't have spoken; I was overcome just for the minute. Mrs. Meadows"—she singled out the plump and ancient housekeeper, and offered a cordial hand—"you'll be sure to understand and explain. I came out of the night into this beautiful new home; it was like a dream, and in a dream one never does the right thing."

Mrs. Meadows accepted this excuse with cordiality and

the white hand with deferential appreciation.

That the new Lady Southern should be unconventional did not displease her, for the last one had been much too

commonplace.

This lady was fair and stately; she fitted the grave beauty of the house as her predecessor had failed to do, and apparently she brought passion instead of capability to endow it. The dame voiced her approval, and the lesser lights of the servants' hall were not slow to follow her amiable lead. Alva added a gracious word of recognition to the butler, conspicuous in his silver hair, distributed smiles in tactful profusion, and returned to the drawing-room.

"Minnie wasn't there," she said to her husband, after a

second or two of silent meditation.

"Who's Minnie?" he inquired coldly, his good-humor only half restored.

"Oh, Peter, you must know Minnie! She's been back here for years; she was my nurse till granny sent her away."

"She's upstairs, my lady," said a voice from behind; and they turned to face Mrs. Meadows again.

"She's nervous," the old lady explained; "she asked

leave to wait upstairs in your ladyship's bedroom."

"Take me to her at once, please;" and, with a nod to Peter, Alva left the room in the wake of her stout guide.

By a long and circuitous route they made their way to the

chamber that for many generations had been relegated to

the brides of the family.

"They often change it later," Mrs. Meadows explained, as she opened the door and stood back to allow her mistress to enter. "It hasn't been used since Miss Griselda's birth. Their last two ladyships couldn't abide it, and it is a bit gloomy for them as don't care particular for old places and ideas. Sir Peter's mother couldn't endure the tapestry nor yet the use of candles; we'd have had the electric light through the house but for the cost of putting it in."

It was evident that she aired part of an old grievance, but Alva heard nothing of it. The candle that the housekeeper carried threw but little light on the vast room; she set it down and lit a pair of ancient candelabra standing on a table beside the door, and objects at once became visible. A fourposter bed loomed into view; then a dressing-table; then the wall behind both, its vagueness broken by a gilt frame or two, inclosing some indistinguishable print. Alva was about to investigate the remainder of the room, when a rustle from the curtains of the bed caught her attention.

"There's some one—is it—yes—it's my Minnie, and she's playing our old game of 'hide-and-seek'!"

Minnie sidled out of the shadows and pressed the hands of this dear recovered nursling to her cheek. She could find no words adequate for so great an occasion. To the fond creature this was, indeed, a dream come true. Her decree of banishment had come as a bolt from the blue, for she loved her charge with all the passion that fate had chosen to repulse at every other point. She had returned to The Court to sew and muse, to lead a pale existence in the atmosphere that had once been so vibrant with life and charm, when, a pretty, brown-eyed woman of nearly thirty, she had taken the handsome gamekeeper from a score of younger and bolder rivals. Only at rare intervals was the monotony broken by the advent of some child visitor, whose cry for a fairy-tale she alone could respond to satisfactorily. She liked to feel the little hands cling to her, liked to watch the eyes grow round with wonder, liked to know that some

one still believed in the magic she had herself learned to mistrust. When the news came that Sir Peter was to wed the child of her tenderest fancies, emotion had made Minnie ill, and on the occasions of Alva's visits she had been absent, recruiting in her native air of Devonshire, whither she always fled in any adversity, as the wounded beast flies to his lair in the forest.

"It's good to have you with me again," said Alva, as the

door closed behind the departing housekeeper.

"It's just a fairy-tale, Miss Alva. I have to pinch myself to be sure it's true. There's hot water in that can, lovey,

and a bit of the soap you used to beg for years ago."

"Shaped like an orange. Oh, Minnie, fancy you remembering! Yes, it's a fairy-tale. Only, that reminds me a little too forcibly of granny; she was always the ogre, though you wouldn't let me say so. How we used to listen for the rustle of her gown going safely down to dinner! And then the bogeys you used to raise for me in the dim light of the fire or the candle, with my pink dressing-gown wrapped round us, and the horrid clock striking hours that nobody wanted to remember! But you never built me quite such a gorgeous castle as this, did you, Minnie? At least, it never belonged to me in the same way. I don't think anybody's house has ever belonged to them in quite the same way as this is going to belong to me."

"How do you mean, Miss Alva?"

"I mean that I'm mistress of it from cellar to garret. There isn't a hole or a corner I shan't poke into; there's treasure in all of them. There are memories and traditions and queer virtues and perhaps vices, collected by the people who had to go; I shall find them and weave them into the prose of modern life, just as the fables were woven into the tapestry years and years ago."

"It must be nearly supper-time," said her companion rather unsympathetically. "Your luggage hasn't come up, but there's a comb on the dressing-table; sit down, Miss

Alva, and I'll tidy your hair a bit."

Alva took a seat before the oval mirror,

"My hair isn't quite as easy to tidy up as it used to be," she said doubtfully, as she lent her head to ministration. "Dora understands the art, but she hasn't come up either."

"Is Dora to wait on you?" the old woman inquired

jealously.

"I'm afraid she must dress me up, Minnie; you see, she's French, and very clever with her fingers. She knows how to make me look beautiful; but you won't quarrel with her for that, will you?"

"What am I to do for you, deary?"

"I've thought it all out, Minnie. Dora is to dress me up and you are to take me to pieces again. That means you will be here at night, and I shall have you to talk to; I'm never sleepy, you know, and Peter comes to bed very late. It will be like the old days back again; you will brush my hair till it shines like gold, and we will whisper together in the firelight about all the things and the people that nobody sees but you and me."

She looked with some surprise at the unresponsive face

of her attendant.

"Aren't you satisfied, Minnie?'

"Yes, Miss Alva, I'm a deal more than satisfied to have you to myself like that; but I don't know as them little boggats I used to raise for you was altogether healthy. I'd like to raise children for you, Miss Alva dear; and, please God, I will before long."

Her mistress frowned a little. "There are children and children," she said irritably, "and some of them, most of

them, are stupid and exacting."

"Yours couldn't be, deary. They'd have gold hair like this, and sweet, wild ways; they'd keep you that busy, you'd have to leave them little holes and corners alone."

But Alva moved impatiently.

"You're a faithless woman, Minnie; you throw me over for younger creatures. Now don't look so serious; I'm only joking. I must go down; I'm hungry after my journey. Show me the way to Peter's dressing-room." "It's the door directly opposite. Shall I tap for you and say you're ready?"

"No, I'll go myself. Hold the candle so that I can see

my way."

Minnie stood in the doorway of the big bedroom, holding the light aloft. She watched the door open, watched the passion flame into her young master's face as he recognized the intruder, watched the pair go, arm in arm, down the long passage and away into shadows of the wide corridor beyond it. Their laughter came back to her ears, but, as the sweet sound of it died away, the brightness died too out of her gentle, faded face. She turned her glance back into the room behind her, and moved her candle, throwing a shaft of light across it.

"It belongs to her," she whispered, "as no other house has ever belonged to anybody else;" and there was an air of defiance in her aspect as she closed the door with a snap, as

on the last word of a prolonged argument.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FACE IN THE GALLERY

During the early part of the supper Stevens and his master kept up a running fire of question and answer. Alva listened absently, garnering stray scraps of information with reference to tenantry, stock, rents, drains, etc. Names lodged in her memory to be reproduced later, but eventually, she was summoned to a more definite intercourse with her companions by a command from Peter.

"Fill Lady Southern's glass," he said to the butler; "I've

a toast to propose."

As the champagne bubbled into it, she felt a thrill of

enthusiasm invade her rather drowsy senses.

"I'll give the toast myself," she cried gaily, and her smile flashed across her husband's face, and on to surprise the old man at her elbow by its remarkable radiance.

Peter turned from it abruptly. He could not have explained to himself, had he tried, the meaning of that sudden recoil. He only knew that for the moment the glitter about him was too strong to be convincing, and, involuntarily, his glance went out to seek some safer, if darker, point of view.

The walls of his vast dining-room, in an alcove of which the table had been placed, were paneled in oak, and his eye sank with relief into the somber quality of it. Gaining courage, it moved on, taking purposeless cognizance of the few and fine pictures. There were a couple of Poussin's works—fugitive drafts, as one of his illustrious critics has elected to call them, remarkable more for their devotion to the laws of anatomy, and to the main point, than for any significance of color. There was a medley of men and horses in bistre by his friend Lebrun, and a landscape by

that most prolific of painters, Claude Lorraine. Lastly, in the far distance, memory rather than good eyesight contrived to reproduce a pair of vivid female faces, the history of whose creation had, for centuries, provided food for argument between the owner of the day and his artistic friends.

Finally the eye, returning from its circuit of the room, lit upon a mirror not very distant from the table. An antique French frame circled the glass, with its faithful reproduction of the figures and objects upon or around it. The young man saw a square of white damask, bright with silver and flowers, with china and Venetian glass; he saw the profile of a woman, the delicate drawing of both face and form, the coils of her yellow hair, the raised arm with the stem of the wine-glass between the long fingers; as he looked, his appreciation battled with an invisible and insidious enemy.

His wife—and therefore his life—was a picture. That sweet voice came to him as the sound of running water comes to a lover of Arcadia. There was youth, there was joy, there was infinite suggestion in its dulcet notes, but there was not the answer to the main ridde of life. That riddle she and the dryads of the forest knew how to evade; they gave no answers of that sort—they gave what cost them nothing—the soulless, mechanical charms of their mysterious being. For an instant her beauty was hideous to him, and he scowled as he listened to what she was saying.

"To the men and women of the past; to all they've done for us, and all they've left to us."

But here the servant, to whom she addressed herself, looked back at her with so terrified an air of astonishment that she paused and sought for stimulation in another direction. She found Peter's face at last in the mirror, but she found, at the same time, the new and alarming expression on it. She was too well accustomed to repulse of this kind to show pique or disappointment. A little of the ardor passed out of her smile, and a little apology came in.

"I'm so sorry; I can't remember," she said gently to the hard eyes in the glass. "They look so real, so very like you and me, Peter; and they didn't want to go and leave all these beautiful things. It must be so cold and dull in that big vault where they're supposed to be enjoying their last long sleep."

Almost as distrustful of this rush of softer emotion invading his senses as he had been startled by his late lapse into animosity, he turned to Stevens and spoke with less

than his customary suavity.

"Lady Southern is drinking luck to the house."
"Yes," she put in quickly, "luck to all the servants in it-to Mrs. Meadows-to my dear Minnie-to you, Stevens."

She put her lips to the rim of her wine-glass, then held it out to him with a regal gesture of good-will.

"Drink; it's a loving-cup-drink to the new mistress of

The Court."

Awkwardly he took the offering, sipped a drop or two of the wine, and set the glass nervously upon the edge of the table.

Peter, taking pity on his obvious embarrassment, signed to him to leave the room.

"Mind you see that every one is asked to celebrate the occasion in champagne," he called out, as the door was closing on the man's broad back.

Stevens took a somewhat garbled version of the night's experience downstairs with him, but it was plain that, once released from his discomfort, he was prepared to accept with loyalty the peculiarities that had bewildered him.

"She's a rare and 'andsome lady," he announced, some ten minutes later, from the head of the table in the servants' hall, fortified with a glass from which he intended to do more than sip. "She's a grand figure-'ead for the place, and after a lady as shall be nameless, seein' as it isn't my way to speak ill of the habsent, she comes hacceptable. odd, that I'll allow, but great families 'as a right to heccentricities; it sets 'em above the crowd-eh, Mrs. Meadows?

Fill up, and drink a long life to 'er. We've 'ad enough, and a bit more than enough, of them little, dark folks as want to know where the last pie but one went to, and 'ow many tumblers is gone since summer twelvemonth. She's the right color, and she's a look of the family. I don't say as she features 'em, but she's the great lady to 'er finger-tips; and if any one thinks contrariwise, let 'im or 'er get up and argue it out with me.'

Of course nobody was in a position to argue with Mr. Stevens, and amity and champagne ruled the rest of the

evening.

Alva was accorded a vehement and quite undeserved demonstration, but, unconscious of it, she sat in the room above, engaged in charming that first serious look of revolt out of her husband's face. It had not been a difficult task: a few soft words, a few kind looks and gentle touches, a sigh for all she might have been and was not, and he was at her feet again.

She chose to lure him into practical discussion concerning the possible and probable demands that would be made upon his time, and he followed this lead with amenity.

"I've been appallingly idle," he confessed; "the mater

did all the work and we get all the benefit."

"She would have it so," Alva reminded him.

"Yes; she didn't leave me much of an opening to interfere, certainly. It suited her to work and it suited me to play. But now I've got my opportunity. I saw Deane for a few minutes before I went up to my room, and he hints of a fine field for our united influence, Alva."

"Oh, and what sort of a field?" she asked, with an

access of coldness.

"He'll explain to-morrow; we're going to have a big morning of it. I shall be out early with him, looking at one or two of the farms, and after breakfast we're to tackle ledgers. I suppose you couldn't—you wouldn't—"

"Couldn't, wouldn't what?"

"Come and join us? You're so quick, not at figures perhaps, but at catching the drift of vague suggestions.

Deane isn't the common man of business. He and the mater never quite hit it off, though each was just enough to see the virtues of the other. I fancy there's poverty about, Alva, but it isn't a paucity of bread. Deane can explain it, though; I'm afraid I can't—as yet, anyway. I think you'll understand him and like him."

He was regarding her with an unmistakable air of appeal, not untouched by anxiety, for her face had hardened.

"I shouldn't think of coming to join you. It would be very tactless. Of course, I shall do all that's right and usual for the people on the estate, but it never pays to interfere in the manner Mr. Deane seems to have hinted at. People are always ready to take bread if they are hungry, but they never take advice, or influence, as I presume he calls it, except as makeweight with the practical charity."

"What shall you do to-morrow? I shall be hours with Deane," he said, trying to suppress all sign of his disap-

pointment.

"I shall have Mrs. Meadows to interview, and then, of course, there's the house to examine. I've scarcely seen it."

"I wanted so much to be there when you went over it,"

he began, but she cut him short.

"You showed me all the state rooms and all the art treasures when we were engaged. It's only the corners and the cupboards that I want to poke into by myself; they aren't of any interest to a man, but they're fascinating to a housekeeper."

"And after lunch?"

"I'll ride with you," she replied graciously, "and learn the boundaries of our kingdom. Now don't look vexed with me again—it's the third scowl in one evening. Why won't you take me as I am?"

"You don't let me take you in any fashion," he complained; and, like a match coming in contact with powder,

the remark set her egoism in a blaze.

"It's your own fault. You're utterly illogical; you won't leave a breath of life in the people of the past, the people who stir my imagination, and yet you ask romantic

excess of feeling for me. Pray what am I to feed it on, if all the men and women in the Gallery are so much canvas? You expect effect, but you won't provide the necessary cause; you're too lazy to enforce the relation that you want. We're steel, more or less, and you must strike us if the sparks are to fly; but no—it's too much exertion. I'm to infuse emotions into you, but you infuse nothing into me. At first I thought, I hoped, you would stand out as an individual. Sometimes when you were angry or reserved I began to weave my fancies round you. But it was no use; you always dropped the fit of passion, you always spoke—King's English, and the web snapped, and I was cross and you were hurt, and life was horrid and prosaic."

He laughed, but ruefully, and left his seat to establish himself with his back to the fire, from whence he could

look down on her petulant face.

"It seems such a roundabout way of meeting, Alva, such a poor compliment to our real selves. I'm in love with you for what you are, but you could only be in love with me for what I conceal. It makes such a farce of marriage."

She, too, left her seat and came to stand beside him. She was tall enough to reach his face with her own, and mistress enough of her emotions now to press her cheek to his with confiding cordiality.

"You're always on the right side of an argument," he

allowed with some reluctance.

"Let's say I'm tired," she coaxed; "we've had a long day of it. There's to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow to scold me in. If you don't like the quality of me, think of the quantity; I'm here for life, giving you all I can of myself."

"I'm a bear," he said, holding her close; "I won't tease

you any more to-night. I'll ring for Dora."

"No, for Minnie; she is the night-nurse. Good-night." She lent her cheek to many kisses; then, taking a candle from the mantelpiece—an old-fashioned affair with a snuffer attached,—she held it out for him to light.

"Shall I take you?" he asked; "the hall is very dark."

"No. I love the darkness, and Minnie will be waiting at the top of the stairs."

She moved rapidly away, holding her candle high, and he stood in the doorway until she turned the corner and was lost to view.

"Are you there, Minnie?"

"I've been waiting close on half an hour, lovey. I thought you'd be up early after your long journey. Give me the light."

"You're to take me through the Long Gallery."

The old woman made no reply, but she walked ahead, with the guttering candle in her hand, and Alva followed, thrilling with superstitious enjoyment of the gloom and the vastness of these new surroundings. In the Gallery the moon was shining through the panes of colored glass at the farther end of it; patches of red and blue and yellow patterned the parquet floor and lay in shafts across a portion of the walls. To this romantic creature, with her life as unlived as that of a child, the moment seemed to promise revelation. It was as though the most precious of her fancies, nursed through a long and monotonous minority, were about to mature, to harden in their molds, thus turning this dreamer of dreams into an anomaly of nature, into a chimerical actuality.

Eagerly she looked about her, catching inspiration from a multitude of trifles, half concealed and half revealed. A pair of pictured eyes, a length of rosy drapery, the brown curved neck of a horse, the two locked hands of, presumably, a nun or a priest—from every corner suggestion flashed out to inspire the responsive mind. Minnie tried to move on, but her mistress had her fast by the arm, and with a physical strength the other was powerless to defy, she bent it with the candle now this way and now that, forcing the light to fall on to face after face of this concourse of silent people. Before a three-quarter length of a woman in a white gown she lingered long.

"Who is it? Oh! who is it?" she said with perplexity. "I know her face; I've talked to her; she calls back a host

of recollections, but I can't give her a name, Minnie. She's living again in a modern woman; what woman?—can't you tell me?"

Minnie shook an ostentatiously indifferent head.

"They're all alike, Miss Alva, to my mind. Some has a dog and some has a baby, and some a rose and some a book as they don't read; I can't see no difference between them, save that some's men and some's women and some's clergy-folk as might be either. Come to bed; the pictures won't run away. You can stare at them all day to-morrow if you're so minded. For my part, I'm sick of them. If I'd my way I'd pack the lot off to a lumber-room and put up something nice and cheerful instead—green fields, Miss Alva, and ships going out to sea, and trees of may-blossom. These folks are all dead, and dead folks ought to go under ground."

"You used to speak more respectfully of the ghosts,

Minnie. You used to like them in the old days."

"Ghosts!" the old woman snorted angrily; "I've never

seen no ghosts to like or dislike."

"Of course you haven't, Minnie; but you've seen lots of the people who used to live here and have been turned out. I expect you to tell me scores of tales about them. There was Sir George, to begin with—Griselda's father, I mean, not her grandfather. I like his eyes—there's a smile and a sigh in them; and then he had to go so early. If I'd died like that, with all the life so hot in me, I couldn't have stayed in any grave. But there, don't look so vexed: take me to bed."

But during the process of hair-brushing, her whimsical

humor crept out again.

"What a wise old bed, Minnie! What somber red curtains! What a lot of us have lain awake behind them waiting for the light! I'm glad," she added, with sudden relapse into flippancy, "that Peter's excellent mother wasn't one of them."

"She never lay awake behind no curtains, Miss Alva dear, and you'll do well to follow her example."

Alva yawned, and sent a last foraging look round the

room before embarking on her prayers.

"Why, there's another door," she exclaimed, "behind the curtain to the right! Now don't call it a cupboard for dresses; tell me it leads, by a corkscrew staircase, down, down to a cellar or a blocked-up vault."

"Well, it does lead to a corkscrew staircase," her attendant admitted; "but it winds up and not down, and it leads to nothing better nor worse than a child's play-

room."

"The Play-room!" Alva cried, and left her seat to hurry to this unexpected point of attraction. "Of course, Griselda told me; they all go that way—the shapes that pass you in the dark. But it's locked," she added, rattling the handle impatiently.

"Of course it is. Nobody wants to go into that dusty

bit of a place, unless it's beetles."

But Alva was, evidently, indifferent to beetles.
"You must find the key," she said peremptorily; "and you're not to go up first and tidy all the rubbish away. I want to poke in it; I've fancies, you know, about the children who used to play there."

"What sort of fancies?" the woman asked.

"Well, there was once a little girl called Gwenny," her mistress replied mockingly; "she's grown up now and her hair's white, but there's a fable in her brown eyes and nobody will explain it to me. She comes once a year to call on granny; and when I ask questions about her, everybody pretends to be absent-minded or deaf. But she used to slip in and out of the conversation much in the manner of an indiscretion—at least, that was how it struck me."

"I can tell you all there is to tell about Miss Gwenny,"

the old nurse said quickly; but Alva laughed.

"No, thank you: I'd rather pry out the story for myself, but not to-night—I'm too sleepy. I'll say my prayers, and then you shall tuck me into bed as you used to do."

In the silence that followed Minnie stared fixedly, but unseeingly, at the bent head, with its two long plaits of

hair. Like some grotesque but benevolent idol she stood, patient and motionless, behind the gracious kneeling figure.

A few minutes later she was bending, with her usual air of gentle ministration, over the bed, in which her mistress lay snugly ensconced.

"I want that funny old rhyme you used to whisper over

me, Minnie."

"It wasn't a rhyme, deary; it was a prayer."

"Well, say it, whatever it was."

"There are four corners to my bed; There are four angels round my head: Two to watch and one to pray, And one to guard me night and day."

"That's it; how it brings back the old thoughts! I always used to disapprove of the distribution of work; it seemed to me that the last angel had an undue amount, while the first two, watching together, were let off much too easily. Now don't frown, you funny old relic—I'm not really profane; I've a great affection for those four angels. I want them established each at a corner of this four-poster; only, I think they'll have to be four guardian spirits of the house."

"You leave them spirits alone, Miss Alva."

"But they won't leave me alone, Minnie."

"That's nonsense, deary. You're the new Lady Southern now, not a child any more."

Alva locked her arms about the woman's neck and whis-

pered into her ear:

"I'm not, and you know I'm not. They all think so, Peter included. But we know better. You taught me magic ever so long ago, and it's all coming back. You and this fairy palace will make it quite easy."

"Make what easy?" the other answered sharply.

"The double life, you dissembler; what are you afraid of? Danger? Discovery? Why, you know as well as I do that nobody can find the fairy except the lover of the fairy; certainly not the 'People Downstairs,' as we used to call them."

"You're tired, deary, and excited; you don't know what you're saying."

Alva laughed again with peculiar enjoyment.

"You shall say so if it makes you happier, but you're an accomplice for all that. You can refuse to speak to me of our guilty secret—of connection and emancipation; you can call me Lady Southern, but you well know, in that constant heart of yours, that it makes no difference. I'm the child you used to bewitch in the firelight; her world was too chill and cold for her, and so you manufactured a pair of wings. I've got them, Minnie, and in the night I spread them and float up and away, out of this dull world. Why do you tremble? Does age make us all nervous? There, you must go—I want to sleep; and you must tell Dora not to come too early in the morning?"

Minnie went in silence. In the corridor she met her

master and he smiled at her.

"Glad to have her back?" he asked pleasantly; but she only shook her head absently, as at some obstruction in a line of thought, and took her noiseless way down to her own quarters.

CHAPTER XIV

A FAMILY RETAINER

At about nine o'clock on the following morning Alva stood in the sunny morning-room regarding a portrait of the lady she had supplanted. The two women had met occasionally, but always with a mutual impression that it

would be advisable to skirt intimacy.

It was to her that the young pair owed their financial prosperity, but it was impossible to accord her more than a theoretical vote of gratitude. It was so obvious that she had no use for gratitude, or even for affection. She was a woman unaccustomed to traffic in emotion; she dealt, and she dealt summarily, with facts and facts only. No inconsiderable amount of her own fortune had been spent upon the estate. The long reign of economy had been consistent, and the tyrant, as she was called below-stairs, had not hesitated to sacrifice her personal luxury. Concessions had crept in where her son was concerned; he had enjoyed an ample allowance at college, and a certain amount of hospitality had been extended to his friends in the autumn. But even these lines of exception had been drawn without any reference to sentiment, and from first to last the intercourse between the two had been unswervingly prosaic.

"It wasn't life at all; it was nothing but routine," Alva said, aware that her husband had entered the room and

was standing behind her.

"You talk as though she were a thing of the past," he objected, "whereas she's intensely alive. I heard from her this morning. She's dipping her fingers into her cousin Tom's property, of which he's been making the proverbial ducks and drakes. She's bought up the mortgages, set him on an allowance, and she'll have the place in good working order in a year or two, but nobody will thank her. Tom will regard her as a positive nuisance. But come to breakfast; I'm literally starving."

"You've been at work since six o'clock, haven't you?"

"Yes; don't say I disturbed you, but all the boards creak like mice in this house, especially if one attempts to tread softly."

"Where have you been?" she asked, with well-concealed indifference, from behind her elaborate coffee equipage.

"Over two of the farms. Both admirably managed, I can tell you. In fact, the estate is one of the best-worked affairs in the county, Deane tells me, and I can well believe it."

"If I told you I was the best wife in the county would you take the assertion on trust?" she asked mischievously; but he looked through her towards the idea engrossing his attention.

"The mater was a wonderful woman. She'd knowledge

of land value positively uncanny."

"I can quite believe it," Alva answered, her glance straying once more to the picture. "I've a positively uncanny

knowledge of the value of dress."

"I've never looked at land with any sympathy before," Peter went on, pursuing his own line of thought. "There's something startling in the relation between it and its farmer: if you're slack the land's slack, if you're generous the land's generous. It's the finest example going of the law of fairplay."

"Yes, dear. Have another egg?"

"They've a brood of hens," said the young man imperturbably, "in young Dawson's farm that beat record with their 'lay.' He's going to make a fortune out of them."

Alva sighed, and relinquished the hope of rousing him to irritation. She was unaccustomed to liberty of idea coming from her husband, and it was a trifle galling to be ignored in this fashion. But, his hunger satisfied, the *Times* skimmed through, Peter woke to a recollection of his wife, and drew her tenderly towards the open window.

"It's not a bad inheritance, is it?" he said, indicating the wide stretch of country before them.

"No; and yet you wanted to be a soldier," she re-

minded him.

"Oh, that's a want in the blood: my father left it me."

"You'd have lost me with the acres. Do you suppose granny would ever have dreamed of letting me follow the drum?"

"She wouldn't have approved, but I like to think those complex properties of your mind would have induced you

to defy her authority."

"The complex properties have a great respect for bodily ease; I like a soft cushion almost as much as a vague idea." But he refused to be lured further into such unprofitable argument at that time of day, and took a somewhat hasty leave of her.

She picked up his *Times* and proceeded to imbibe the most important news in it. She had no intention of playing an ignorant part in county society; she meant to show up seldom, but always with distinction; and she believed herself ingenious enough to embroider an arresting pattern of her own on to such of the daily topics, political, artistic, or religious, as it would be necessary to take into account.

Mrs. Meadows' tap on the door caused her a rapid heartbeat, for the old lady represented a dangerous factor in the sum of hostile influence out against her liberty of action.

After a commonplace or two the inevitable question appeared:

"About the orders, my lady?"

"Yes," said Alva cautiously, "it must be a serious affair catering for a house of this kind; I've had no experience whatever, but—of course—the meals—the dinners—must be arranged for."

The note of helplessness was intentional, and, encouraged by the sound of it, the housekeeper produced a paper

from beneath her black silk apron.

"The meals for this week were all arranged for, but if you could suggest any alterations, my lady, I should be

pleased to make them. All these dishes are favorites of Sir Peter's, I may mention."

Alva was glad to let her eyes drop to the paper. She was fearful lest the satisfaction in her heart should be reflected upon her face. It was so manifest that the good dame meant to play into her hands. The very responsibility that she dreaded and disdained this woman desired, just as she herself desired a free field for the exercise of her wanton fancies. Mechanically her eye passed down the list: French savories and Russian salads, spring chickens and creatures in aspic; it was not of tastes and digestions she thought, but of the degree of indignity expressed by such a renunciation of her household rights as the occasion was offering.

"The last Lady Southern ordered everything, I be-

lieve?" she began, tentatively.

"Yes, my lady; but it was never what I should call a satisfactory arrangement. There was continual grumbling in the servants' hall. Miss Griselda's mother left everything to my judgment, and I must really say that things went better, even if a pound or two more was spent in the week. We can't help hoping that you'll give us another trial on the old plan. Mr. Stevens has never been quite himself since her last ladyship took away the key of the wine-cellar. It's the confidence, my lady, and if things don't work out well, they can always be changed again."

"That's quite true," Alva agreed, grateful to the woman for the tactful form in which her suggestion had been

worded.

"I've had so much experience, my lady, and the work's such a pleasure to me. May I take it that, for the present at any rate, things are to remain as they used to be before the advent of the last mistress? May I take it that all the arrangements for the comfort of the house are to be in my hands? I could see your ladyship for a few minutes every morning and learn if there were any special orders you wanted carried out or any visitors expected."

"Yes, Mrs. Meadows, we'll try your way and see how it

answers. For the present, there will be no visitors to consider; and as for food, I'm indifferent to what I eat, and you know Sir Peter's tastes far better than I do. I'll see you, as you suggest, for a few minutes at this time in the morning, just to be sure that the wheels are running smoothly."

There was a gracious note of dismissal in her accent, and Mrs. Meadows, having secured her precious point, took glad advantage of it. Alva sat for some minutes, the prey to a slight prick of discomfort. She was too shrewd to overlook the fact that she had been tempted into a definite form of treachery. She had, tacitly, washed her hands of any responsibility concerning the practical welfare of her house, but she was too practiced in self-esteem to allow the sense of guilt much license.

She decided to begin her examination of the picturegallery by this excellent morning light, and she made her way, not without numerous wrong turns, in the direction of it.

It was delightful to lose oneself, over and over again, in one's own house; and she was almost sorry when success finally crowned her efforts, and she found herself once more in the fine company so stimulating to her imagination.

Every subject had to claim some connection with the family, but the area over which the record spread was wide, and this was no mean collection of artistic efforts. In the best lights there were Van Dycks and Lelys, Gainsboroughs and Sir Joshuas; Sir Thomas Lawrence was represented, though not in his happiest vein, and Ingres set his name, at least, to an imposing figure of female haughtiness. Alva had seen enough of foreign galleries, and heard enough discussion on art, to suspect the genuineness of more than one of these family possessions, but the doubt failed to infect her enthusiasm. She was prepared to take these effigies of life at a valuation of her own, connected solely with the nature of their appeal to her emotions.

In spite of her avowed devotion to the antique, it was

soon apparent that curiosity drew her, slowly, but surely, to the modern end of the room, where Lehnbach, Sargent, Fildes, and many a latter-day representative of art had been at work.

She looked with dreamy ecstasy on slim Southern youths in quaint attire; on the gentle-eyed hounds courting the touch of their preternaturally long and white fingers; on Southern maidens with high waists and round, soulless faces; on priests and scholars, on soldiers and statesmen; but the magnet brought her, eventually, to the spot at the end of the room where the last baronet but one held the place of honor.

It was typical of Henry that, even after death, he should make himself subservient to the brother he had succeeded.

To be sure, his picture had been painted when he was a younger son, and it was an unpretentious piece of work; it was also undeniable that George made the finer centerpiece. He was in pink, and the brown nose of a favorite mare nozzled his shoulder. The rein was drawn over his arm; he lingered, but not without reluctance, to allow the artist the rather ridiculous opportunity of offering him to posterity: in another moment, one felt, he would be off, to the forest that had tanned his fair skin to so delightful a shade of brown—to the forest, in whose depths his eye had already caught the trail of some quarry, more potent than bird or beast.

Alva looked into those strange eyes, at once audacious and tragic, and on to the face of the pale dark brother, with a wrinkling of the forehead.

It was perverse of fate to link her with the uninteresting side of the family. Henry was well-featured and well-looking; he had the same air of quiet restraint that marked his only son. From him, doubtless, Peter had inherited that ingrained respect for establishment and the trivial round so provoking to this child of romance.

Her eye always returned to the hunter. Let memory and the social powers tie him to Bertha Venner and non-achievement if they chose; she would consent to bind him to no such chariot-wheels. He had gone unmated, in all the finer senses of the term; he had gone abruptly with unspent passion in his veins. Let the historian of his house write his neat record: of birth—of marriage—of issue—of death; let the great doors open first to one successor, then to another. Not so easily did these earthly chains regulate the movements of human vitality. The real history, the unfinished history of this restless, despoiled man lurked in the atmosphere of his home; one had only to keep very still, to banish even thought, and into the vacuum created crept the consciousness of a dominant personality. For this girl it took more than an unsteady mare and a park fence to dam the stream of expression.

When tired of the intensity of her own surrender to one sort of emotion, she set her wits to work in a new direction—viz., on the discovery of a route to the library.

This retreat promised her, besides a comfortable chair, another sort of companionship. It was said to contain, as well as its array of books, an ancient librarian.

For about sixty years Calder had lived at The Court. As a young man he had worked under his father at the cataloguing and scheduling of the rare volumes collected by the family during many centuries; and on the elder Calder's death, forty years ago, the younger had taken and since kept the entire control of the place.

He was a man of good blood and considerable independence of character. For nearly two hundred years these scions of an impoverished great family had been the protégés of the Southerns. Not that the term had ever been employed by either side; the Calders were unfortunate, the Southerns fortunate, gentlemen. The Calder of the day was accustomed to meet the baronet of that same day with something a trifle less amenable than an air of equality. To these plain livers and long thinkers property was the attribute, and mind the pivot, round which existence moved with, for them, such ponderous gravity. They had a tendency, born perhaps of their occupation, to drift, year by year, a little further into philosophic reverie; and

though the age would have had little patience with it, the

Southerns had, apparently, much.

The flippancy of the times was seldom allowed to penetrate the atmosphere of the room where this particular Calder had sat from youth to age; and when, at rare intervals, a bevy of gaily dressed people, women for the most part, forced their way into his sanctum, it was invariably the world, and not the spirit (as expressed in the shape of this recluse), that was put to the blush of awkwardness.

Young Calder eyed the invaders sourly—he scored off such of their weaknesses as they betrayed, pitilessly; middle-aged Calder eyed them analytically, seeking to deduce from their varied aspects what he could of revelation concerning humanity; old Calder looked at them with disdain or reproach, in that they had failed, one and all, to provide his mind with any very satisfactory conclusions concerning the necessity for their existing at all.

The old man's keen eye was always on the hunt for breeding material, but disappointment had soured its outlook, and he had practically resigned himself to the theory that the vaunt of his classics with regard to the sacred quality of the vital spark was certainly unproven, and, in all probability, unsound.

At first Alva believed the room to be empty. She established herself in a broad and deep-seated leather chair and amused herself by staring at the multitudinous covers of the books lining three of the walls from floor to ceiling. The blinds had been drawn to keep the sun from their more or less handsome backs, and the room was so vast that much of it remained necessarily in shadow. It was only after two or three journeys round it that her eye lit suddenly upon a ladder. It was a long, thin, decidedly unsteady-looking ladder, and at the very top of it sat a diminutive figure in a skull-cap and a gray dressing-gown.

She cried out in her astonishment, and the ladder began to rock violently. She ran forward to steady it, and looked

up with considerable anxiety at the old man above.

"Dear me!" he said fretfully, peering down through a pair of spectacles; "what a tiresome young woman!"

Doubtless, like many another hermit, he was accustomed

to voice aloud his inner thoughts.

"I'm Lady Southern," she said. But if it was an apology she angled for, it was the last thing she would be likely to receive.

"Of course," he said dryly. "Who else should you be? It's not likely that two strange women would come to the

house in one day."

Alva decided to be tickled by the novelty, rather than

annoyed by the discourtesy, of this address.

"Suppose you come down?" she suggested; "I'll hold the ladder. It's awfully rickety, and I can't think how you ever dared to go up so high."

Mr. Calder continued to glare down at her for some seconds; then, with infinite deliberation, he stood up and began the descent, turning round after every step to locate the next one.

When he was safely established on the floor Alva heaved an audible sigh of relief.

"I don't think you ought to climb to such a height at your age," she said severely; "you might have been killed." He was engaged in trying to remove a patch of dust from

his shoulder, and took his time over replying.

"I'm quite ready to go when I'm wanted," he said at last, as he took a chair. He leaned back in it, putting the tips of his fingers together with an air of resignation. "Take a seat," he added, as an afterthought, and she took the one nearest his own.

"I thought I'd come and see you, Mr. Calder," she began, finding he had apparently no intention of starting a topic

for her.

"Well, you've seen me."

"And to have a chat with you, Mr. Calder."

For a moment it looked as if the librarian would protect himself from her persistence by going to sleep, but he jerked his eyes open and regarded her sharply.

"Do you think we should either of us gain any benefit out of a chat?" he inquired with discouraging listlessness.

"Have you never come across anybody who proved to be worth the expenditure of half an hour of your time?"

Her tone was that of unadulterated satire, but he an-

swered quite simply.

"Everybody looks at matters from one standpoint, Lady Southern. It's always, 'I think this,' and 'I feel that,' and 'I want the other.' There's no concentration of force."

"But that's exactly what I complain of," she cried eagerly. "Only the individual is considered; he won't let himself be absorbed into history; he won't become a part of life; he must be the center, and he makes such a tame, insignificant center, doesn't he?"

"Yes, but it isn't always a 'he,'" the old gentleman observed, and he closed his eyes once more, thus putting

an effectual stopper on the discussion.

Alva was conscious that any of the emotions natural to the occasion would be at a discount, so she swallowed her indignation and chose a new point of attack.

"You've been here a great many years; you must have seen a great many people come and go."

"A great many people have come and gone," he admitted, "but I can't say I've seen much of them."

"Well, you must have seen Sir George," she said

sharply.

"Yes; he was a very wealthy old gentleman; not enlightened, not in the least enlightened—rather restricted, in fact, but an honest creature."

"I mean Sir George the younger," she explained, and Calder appeared to be routing up an old and not important

memory.

"Sir George the younger; yes—yes—to be sure; there was a son—two sons, I believe. Ah! now I have them, George and Henry, both gone before, my dear."

"Yes, of course, or I shouldn't be reigning here, Mr.

Calder."

"No more you would; well, it's a pity—it's a great pity they died so young."

Alva thought it best not to inquire whether her advent

emphasized the pitiful nature of the case.

"Did he ever come here and talk to you?—Sir George,

I mean?"

"He came here, but he wasn't much of a talker. He used to inquire after the state of my health—which never varied, and he used to admire the covers of the books; but I could have kept white mice between those same covers and he'd have shown more interest in the mice than the sacrilege—not that I blame him; I'm not sure his wasn't the wiser attitude. It's better to look into the mechanism of a live mouse with intelligence than into the minds of fifty wise men with indifference. But the difficulty is to find a live animal to examine; the race is dead, my dear, dead as a door-nail, and its movements are only muscular—only muscular," he repeated mournfully.

"Don't stop, Mr. Calder. Tell me more about George. He was very much alive, for a time, anyway. He had a story; you can't deny it. It's been kept back. There's a conspiracy of silence, but the spirits in this old house are trying to betray the secret. They whisper to me, Calder—they try to explain, and its always the story of George they're worrying about. They won't allow him to be the ordinary happy husband and father; they won't allow Bertha Venner to be his morning-star, and indeed it isn't at her he's looking in his picture at the head of the Long

Gallery; he's looking higher than her fashionably-dressed head. Who's he looking at?"

"Must it be an individual?" the librarian inquired dryly. "Why not an actual morning-star? He was neither fool nor scholar, and such nomads have a tendency to worship

at strange shrines."

"You won't trust me," she said, with the vehemence of acute disappointment; "you won't give me the name. But suppose I find it for myself?—suppose I call the siren (or was she a saint?) Gwenny?"

Boldly she searched his withered face for some suggestion of dismay, but he showed nothing more illuminative

than a slight increase of animation.

"Gwenny," he repeated softly, reminiscently, "the little girl with yellow hair. It's a good name, Lady Southern, less vulgar than many you might have chanced upon. And she came here, long ago, and sat in that very chair where you are sitting; and she too chattered of stars and spirits, of books in the running brooks, and everything that's pretty and unproven. She must be old by now; the yellow must be white or nearly so. George was right—the star keeps its color but the woman doesn't. Take your Gwenny away; I don't know where or why you found her, but she's no more use in an argument than a worn-out pair of gloves."

"But she was young once," the girl persisted, "and the mark she made then remains, even if decay has taken the

marker away."

Mr. Calder shook his head with a return to his original

air of disdainful patronage.

"I don't agree with you," he said; "I see no significance in individuals. An attempt was made to vitalize but it failed. A little spirit spurts up here and there, as in a dying fire, but it only serves to reveal the decadence of its own cause. We're a burnt-out force, existing for just a little longer than is advisable or dignified, owing to a small fund of habit left over by the centuries that are gone."
"What a horrid creed!" said Alva, hoping, however, to

lure him into further epitome of it; but the old man drew a gigantic silver timepiece from his pocket, and remarked that he always took his luncheon punctually at one o'clock,

and it was then exactly three minutes to the hour.

CHAPTER XV

THE DELICATE AND DIFFICULT ART OF EVASION

They call it a play-room and never suspect
There's enchantment behind the untidy effect:—
That, down in the corner, wrapped up in the gloom,
There sits a grim woman, at work on a loom:
That over the ceiling, with cobwebs embossed,
Are riding—full gallop—for "Paradise Lost"
The Little Tin Soldier, the Wandering Jew,
The horrid "Old Woman who lived in a Shoe,"
The fairy we startled, the doll we forgot,
The lady with wings, from the end of our cot.
Then follow the magic, but go unawares,
Or they'll stop us, for certain, "The People Downstairs."

Away into space, into company rare;
For there's method in what they call madness, down there;
And fact is the fantasy, logic the dream;
The only reality—"things as they seem";
The elves of the woodland, the witches of night,
The beckoning figures of children in white;
The women who bartered their lives for a ring,
The soldiers who bled for a Cause or a King;
The mystic Majority—worsted by law—
Have discovered the pass-word and opened the door.
Then follow the magic, but go unawares,
Or they'll chain us to reason, "The People Downstairs."

The veil of the mountain, the song of the shell,
How swiftly we ride on the track of their spell!
The essence of wonder, the seed of desire,
How boldly we scatter their circle of fire!
Great god of emotion, your secret we hold;
But why is the secret so still and so cold?
Can such venturous instinct submit to defeat?
Was the ghost of our childhood a broomstick and sheet?
The narrow conditions we thought to have fled,
The fates of the feeble, the graves of the dead;—
Was it these that we followed and took unawares,
While the magic remained with "The People Downstairs"?

Finding another hour of freedom still upon her hands before lunch, Alva decided to investigate the play-room, and now she sat cross-legged upon the dusty floor with a battered old exercise-book in her lap in which the above verses had been scribbled presumably a good many years ago. They were unsigned, but she had her own notions concerning the authorship of them, though it appeared she intended to keep her speculations to herself, for when hailed by a voice from the stairway she hastily tore the leaf from the book and thrust it into the front of her white cambric waist.

"What are you doing, Miss Alva? That room isn't fit to go into?"

Presently a gray head appeared and then a thin form in a voluminous apron.

"I'm making discoveries, Minnie dear."

"The thing you're most like to discover here is some nasty germ," the old woman replied with an unsympathetic sniff.

"Well, open the window and let it out."

Minnie lifted the heterogeneous collection of articles off the window-sill and proceeded to wrestle with a rusty bolt.

"That's better," she said, as the window slipped open and a current of warm June air swept into the room.

Alva sniffed at it eagerly as it reached her, and came to

stand beside her companion.

"Ah, there's a Gloire de Dijon trying to look in; I thought I smelt him—and oh! what a long way below the garden is!"

"Yes, it's a terrible height up," said the old woman dreamily, as she bent out to look down in her turn. "But the young gentlemen thought nothing of it," she added, forgetful, it seemed, of her customary reserve.

"Thought nothing of it—what do you mean? Why should they think anything?" Alva inquired in a puzzled

voice.

"Look there, Miss Alva-there, where I've torn the

ivy away a bit; do you see them little steps? They go right down to the ground and right up to the roof."

"Oh, Minnie! you don't mean to say the children used

to climb them?"

"Yes, but I do," the old woman answered with excitement. "It was their secret stairway; it was cut by Mr. George and Mr. Henry, when they were no higher than my waist. You see, the wall's hid from any folks as might be in the garden by this angle of the wall; and hundreds of times, to my knowledge, they come up this way to the roof or in at this window. They got a grip of the ivy; it's that old, it's as good as a rope to hold by."

"And did they never come to grief, Minnie?"

"Not by that road, lovey. I suppose grief has to come to each of us in its own way and at its own time, and we can't choose the way nor yet the time, by climbing up the sides of houses."

"But didn't you get somebody in authority to stop them?"

"No, Miss Alva. It doesn't do to treat children that way. I begged them not to, times and again, but if I'd carried the tale downstairs, they'd never have let me near them again. Children have to go through a certain amount of risk, and these children were sure-footed as cats—all the Southerns are," she finished, with the pride of a partial family retainer.

"I thought you lived with the keeper at the lodge,

Minnie?"

"Not till I was nigh on thirty. I lived here as housemaid, under and upper, from sixteen onwards, and I married from the place, fool that I was! but that's neither here nor there."

"And they used to bring Gwenny here," Alva mused aloud; "but that must have been much later; they weren't

boys any more when she came to visit them."

"How you do worry about Miss Gwenny! Of course they brought her up here at times; they used the room long after they were grown men. They used to clean their guns or mend their fishing-tackle or what not. All folks like a bit of a place as they can have to themselves. But it's close on two, and if you're to ride after your lunch you'd better get yourself ready before."

Alva submitted to be led downstairs to her bedroom and handed over to the waiting Dora to be dressed for her

ride.

"I've never seen you in such a state before, my lady," the girl declared pertly, "and there's scarce ten minutes to put you right in. I've been looking for you this last 'alf-'our."

Dora's "h" was apt to come and go, contingent, for the most part, on the amount of spare breath she happened to be in possession of. She was a stout, florid young person, with an excellent opinion of herself, and Alva's occasional snubs made little headway against this imperturbable spirit of complacency.

She spoke briskly, with an accent that had, originally, been Lancashire, but now possessed a thin layer of French polish, acquired during a brief sojourn in a Paris hair-dressing establishment. Minnie had a soft and unusually refined voice for one of her class, and she and Dora were

too adverse in type to quarrel.

Each looked with good-natured tolerance at the limitations of the other, seeing in them a satisfactory barrier against the favor of their mistress.

"Impossible to do more than pity such a frump!" was Dora's inward comment; and "Impossible to be fond of

such a pert piece of affectation!" was Minnie's.

It amused Alva to let herself be bullied, to a certain extent, by her two attendants. And in matters relating to the toilet, Dora was no mean adept; even the stiff details of a riding-dress could be made, by her deft fingers, to pander subtly to a lover of the picturesque. Her mistress took a last complacent look at her own image in the oval glass, before she went down, with her long skirt over her arm, to join her husband.

She encountered the agent in the hall, taking leave, and

she approached him, with her free hand extended in cordial greeting.

"It's Mr. Deane, isn't it?" she said gaily; "and he

hasn't yet forgiven me my hole-and-corner entrance."

Mr. Deane was a thin, small man, with no hair on his face and but little on his head; he had bright, eager, kindly eyes, and a forehead always wrinkled up, generally in sym-

pathy with the troubles of other people.

"We shall forgive darker wrongs if you ask us in that fashion," he said, and the gallantry did not sit as ill on him as one might have expected, for it was paternal in its character. Inwardly he accused this fair and beautiful woman of coquetry, but he rather approved than otherwise such thorns about so unmistakable a rose, and coquetry is a very human foible and usually connected—so he argued—with warmth of temper.

Eagerly he embarked upon the recital of his hopes concerning the welfare of the estate, explaining that from a material standpoint there was little or nothing to improve. The cottages were in good repair; the farms were all well let; the drains immaculate; destitution practically non-existent. But would Lady Southern understand him if he added that there was too much comfort? He could only explain his meaning by a reference to the absence of what the poets, he believed, called "divine discontent." There was lethargy, laxness, both mental and physical. These people around them had been stimulated to a point; they had achieved independence and ease, but they were lamentably unconscious of the great law that forbids stagnation. They wanted now incentive of another kind; and as he spoke his thin cheek glowed with fervor, but Alva did not respond to it.

The same veil of discreet reserve that she had, more than once, offered to Peter's attack upon her freedom, was produced, but the agent, unfamiliar with its significance, gave her no time to speak.

"We stand on a safe rock, Lady Southern, but we want to cultivate a few flowers upon it. You can have no idea how difficult it is to instil into this particular class a taste for the right flowers, or how dangerous is the practice common to it, of discarding flowers altogether. I wonder if I'm making myself intelligible?" he finished, a first doubt beginning to invade his optimism.

"The flowers of the intellect, I presume you mean. I'll offer them, Mr. Deane, and with all the discretion I possess; but I must warn you that I'm a staunch advocate for independence, and if I'm told to keep my enlightened ideas to myself, I shall consider that I've only got my

deserts."

The agent was apparently staggered by this unexpected repulse. He changed color and looked down into his hat, uncomfortably aware that he had been tricked into premature eloquence by a deceptive aspect. With a bitter consciousness of disappointment and defeat, he retired on to a few courteous platitudes, and took his leave. Sir Peter followed him to the door, listening absently to the

apology he proffered for his late intensity.

"I hope I wasn't impertinent. It's the last thing I meant to be; but I'm so steeped in love of the place and the people on it that I forget social fences. I see a fine instrument suited to my particular purpose, and I pick it up without a 'with-your-leave' or 'by-your-leave.' Your mother was a remarkable woman, Sir Peter, and she did the rough work as no other could have done, but she hadn't the wand of personal magic. Folks went to her with sore heads, not with sore hearts. But that lovely wife of yours is an influence few could withstand. I was carried away by the look of her, and I'm afraid I spoke without due respect of persons and conditions."

"No, Deane, you spoke very much to the point, and she'll say so herself before long. She's even more deeply in love with the place than we are. You mustn't doubt it, even though she wouldn't follow your lead just now. She's to ride with me over it this afternoon. Remember she's seen nothing; it's a dream kingdom as yet, and she winces at

every prosaic touch on it."

"But I meant my touch to be anything but prosaic," the

other objected.

"I know you did, but she has her own views as to what constitutes prose, and I'm not very well versed myself yet. Mind you come up in the morning at the same time, and we'll run through those ledgers."

But as he returned to the hall, Peter's expression altered. His wife lingered there, playing absently with the fronds of a giant palm, and with unusual roughness he captured

the idly moving fingers.

"You've got to play fair, Alva. You belong to me and my people. You can dispel this torpor of which Deane speaks if you choose to take the trouble-but will you?"

"Yes, when you put it that way," she answered unex-

pectedly.

But at this first word of submission his anger and his power over her dissolved together. He knew, even as he pressed the hot palm of her hand to his mouth, that he broke the rare thread of union between them. He knew, even before she snatched the hand away, that the disruption was his own doing; though he rebelled at the knowledge as a man rebels at a travesty of logic whose folly he is powerless to expose.

"And do you call it playing fair to give me the same monotonous tale morning, noon, and night?" she retorted. "I give you variety, at least; I give you sensations, even if they're angry ones; but what, pray, do you give me, except the alphabet of maudlin sentiment?—the 'I love you— I love you—I love you' of every wooer from the beginning

of time?"

A saving sense of the ridiculous came to the rescue of the situation, emphasized by the opportune sounding of the luncheon gong. For a moment he saw her as a petulant child rather than an evading goddess. He saw her playing with facts as a little girl plays with her dolls, and he told himself that she would tire of the mimic companionship so soon as life began to circle.

He was hungry after a long morning's work; there was

food and there was sunshine waiting for him. There was the long afternoon with this fantastic creature beside him; and with a laugh, not wholly forced, he left her, his further protest unuttered, and went upstairs to wash his

She remained for a minute or two in the quiet hall, prey once more to that faint prick of mental discomfort, but it passed off as rapidly as its forerunners had done, or rather, it was submerged gradually into the passion dominant in her veins; and as a tyrant punishes the defiance of the slave his cruelty has provoked into rebellion, so her inflamed temper set to work evolving new lines of division between herself and the disturber of her dreams.

She had thought to set her husband at the outer gate of her personality, had thought to give him such confidences as egoism could spare; but now there came to her a first doubt as to his ability to accept even these crumbs of intimacy, and her treachery took another step forward. Musing darkly and rapidly, she came to the resolution to play a more definite part in practical intercourse with him, and, under cover of this concession, to set a thicker hedge between their spiritual proximity.

The plan worked smoothly enough on this first afternoon. There was much material ground to review and criticize, and there was just mundane appreciation enough in Alva's mind to enable her to sound a convincing note of interest in the width and breadth of her new dominion. It pleased her vanity to look with the eye of possession on these well-tilled acres and these rows of obviously rustic faces. It pleased her to be gracious to all, and to realize that this same graciousness made an indubitable effect.

But it was on this same night that there came to her a first suspicion of the flaw in her idol, the idol to which she sacrificed so glibly the rights and the pleasures and the hopes of others. It reached no point of definition, but her mind, circling boldly in the atmosphere of its choice, lit suddenly upon the disturbing knowledge that isolation, like every other virgin force, suffers from a sense of incompleteness. It was as though a supernaturally clever artist had been condemned to play to empty benches; and though much of the impression of limit passed away in sleep, she met the new day with a sub-conscious determination to keep a hitherto forgotten door ajar for the welcome of that partisan, without name or form, who, according to the laws of her being, was bound, eventually, to come to the defense.

CHAPTER XVI

DORSET COMES INTO PROPERTY

Bertha Southern's expectations were duly fulfilled, and her future son-in-law spent but a month or two in Uganda.

A telegram announcing the death of his brother then recalled him from a sphere of action that had already set its

stamp of disillusion on his spirit.

It may have been merely the effect of the climate upon an essentially British constitution, but it seemed to him from the first that he could read a certain malicious assertion in the dark faces about him—the assertion that his boats were burnt, that he was trapped in a country that had no use for him, by a country whose vanity demanded these vain sacrifices, and the only mark he could hope to make was that of physical endurance. He trusted that these impressions were erroneous—were but the emanations exhaled by a sickly fancy; he trusted that a more experienced mind would be able to read into the situation, not malice but appeal—the cry for education and the awakener. Still, it was impossible to misconstrue the thrill that went through him on the receipt of a cable from England, and it was equally impossible, he found to his consternation, to erect any convincing monument of grief over the remains of his brother.

His Government having been warned of this contingency, he was enabled to start for home without much delay, and in June he landed in England and made for the north.

His new possession lay some thirty miles distant from Edinburgh, and its isolation gave it what claim it had to importance. Such little country estates, like Alexander, reign alone, and do not suffer much from comparison with greater ones. There were but few neighbors within calling distance, unless the ubiquitous motor should come into serious play, and the neighborhood round The Little Castle, as it was christened, had a reputation for conservatism.

It had been in the family for several centuries, but, unlike The Monk's Revel, it had gradually acquired, instead of resigning, land. The Dorsets had started as farmers (from the point, that is, at which their history became traceable) and they had advanced to the position of small squires; from here, onward to that of country potentates, entitled to shoot their own birds, the way had been easy, owing to their shrewd heads, their thrifty habits, and a qualified racial bent towards progression.

A small portion of the farming land was retained and tended for household use, but the greater part was sublet, and brought in an income adequate to the demands of a

people singularly free from extravagant ideas.

Arthur Dorset was an exception to the family rule, and led an idle life, the result, possibly, of physical delicacy. He left his affairs in the hands of a steward thoroughly honest but not particularly capable; and Harry, racing as fast as an express could take him towards authority and independence, came to the conclusion that he would be his own manager and that certain indiscretions (they were scarcely abuses) he had detected in the working of the estate should be abolished.

His expectations had a wide field over which to circuit, and if an inanimate block of stone and mortar composed the central point to them, that point inclosed another and a more delicate one.

It had been comparatively easy to keep Griselda at arm's length so long as a pen was permitted to define the nature of their intercourse, but, with the knowledge that a day or two must bring him within the range of that personality with which he had already warred somewhat helplessly, the young man became aware of a certain throb of the pulses that had once before been the forerunner of mental collapse.

He had the railway carriage to himself, and he looked out into columns of gray smoke, blown by the laboring engine past the window. Many faces formed and faded; many promises, sweet and sinister, floated into view and out

again.

Conscious that a single face was beginning to take undue prominence he compelled memory to hark back to views at temperamental enmity with this insidious trespasser; he recalled old forms of pride, flattered old prejudices, but always with a furtive eye on the effect such opposition might be calculated to produce in the sensitive aspect of his temptress. He told himself that he meant to teach her her limit, while still holding her fiercely to that intoxicating promise that he would not fully accept but could not absolutely reject. To reassure a slumbering suspicion of meanness in this attitude he drove his mind back to the wrongs of the past. Again he bent an extravagantly deferential back to the edicts of the law that had made of him that inconsidered trifle—a younger son; again he looked at the vineyard he had so obstinately ignored, and beneath the light of later circumstances he saw that it had always been Naboth's. He had been the slave of chance; he had been housed among the casualists of the day; he had been compelled to hang upon the skirts of patronage, with every drop of blood in his veins, hereditary and cultivated, clamoring for autocracy.

Now he was the master of moderate circumstances, of an ancient house, she must regard him suitably, not with that half petulant, half quizzical, wholly untamed expression. Gradually he contrived to secure a mental upper hand, to compel into the saucy loveliness of her face a look of submission. A realist, probing deep, might have translated the demand as "the unquestioning submission of the gifted greater to the arbitrary less," for, surely, she was great with inconsequence, with immaturity, with pliancy of

mind.

But for Harry Dorset at this time women were divided neatly into three divisions. There were those he approved, those he disapproved, and those he contrived to ignore. There had been an accident or two, an occasional defeat at some hands he had presumed to criticize too carelessly, but the record behind him had no very dark stain upon it, and lack of development was perhaps the main count against his intelligence and his generosity.

At the country station where he alighted, a trap was awaiting him, and he disposed rapidly and pleasantly of the five miles of hilly land separating him from his new

home.

For his sister-in-law it was impossible to feel liking or disliking; she was pretty, conscientious, limited in idea, and Arthur had married her because he was too intrinsically lazy to woo a woman of character and too fundamentally domestic to live alone.

For the children Harry had more tender thoughts. one he saw the strain of gravity and reserve that had complicated so early his own outlook upon life; in another he saw the amiable garrulity of the mother, made charming by curls and color and extreme youth; in a third he thought to catch the look, so nearly forgotten, so oddly influential, shut behind a coffin lid, upon the face of his only sister, a child of nine, and, he had fancied, his secret adorer. The baby resembled all the lovely children of every generation; she was round and roguish and confiding; she was ready to transfer her sticky thumb from her own mouth to her grave uncle's with quite disarming cordiality, and there was primitive paternity enough in him to appreciate the unconscious appeal of all four upon his generosity. And the type of sacrifice they demanded was precisely that which it pleased him to give. It pandered to his love of authority.

But in his long talk with Annie after dinner, he had to curb considerable impatience. She had an unfortunate tendency to touch susceptible nerves with a finger rough,

he could only suppose, from lack of education.

She was grateful, honest, a devoted mother, but he found himself seconding her suggestion to move across the border with her young family with suggestive emphasis.

Eventually this move was decided upon; a spot suitable for educational purposes selected, and the lady's income (a point absolutely at the mercy of the new heir) settled, to her unmistakable relief and satisfaction. She might well be satisfied, for her brother-in-law had engaged to supply her with a sum not far short of one-third the amount produced by the estate, an amount which in its entirety had never sufficed to substantiate the dream of Mrs. Dorset's married life—a small establishment in town during the season.

While accepting with gratitude and some emotion this happy solution of her troubles she could not refrain from catechizing her benefactor with reference to his coming marriage.

The news of his engagement, so it transpired, had been betrayed by Lady Southern, under the heading "private and confidential," directly after Arthur's death, and Annie was full of kindly wishes not altogether disconnected from her own pecuniary interests.

"I shan't be quite at my ease, Harry, till you've established the succession. You see, it goes, in the event of your sudden death—and sudden deaths are common to all flesh," she put in parenthetically, "to the Vernon Dorsets, and she -Mrs. Vernon-gambles all day and all night, so I've heard. How soon do you think of marrying?"

"As soon as it can be fixed up, I expect, as you don't

want any interval of mourning."

"I can't afford to want it," she said pathetically.
"Lady Southern may hold out for a big function," he

suggested; but Annie shook her head.

"Oh no, she won't do that. She never wants her daughter too much in evidence. I'm not very bright, but I've gathered that much out of her. She'll be sure to want a quick wedding and a quiet wedding. The fact is," she added, with some embarrassment, "there has been talk."

"About what?" he inquired sharply.

"About an elderly and wealthy Colonel of Dragoons, retired. It seems he wanted Griselda, and Lady Southern

had to tell him she was engaged; but if I'm not very much mistaken, Harry, she has hopes of catching his heart on the rebound. She and Griselda are staying with him, at the

present moment, in some cottage on the river."

In response to this startling information the young man asked for a railway-guide, fixed his departure for an early hour in the morning, despatched the groom to the post-office with a couple of wires, and listened to the residue of Annie's gossip with a very obviously affected air of attention.

CHAPTER XVII

DORSET COMES INTO MORE PROPERTY

Driving to the Carlton, whither Lady Southern had summoned him with reassuring promptness, Dorset came to one or two satisfactory conclusions: firstly, the Colonel must have come to the scratch, or the lady would hardly have selected this particular hotel; secondly, it was plain he himself still ranked as a factor in her schemes, or she would not have bidden him to dinner in so casual and friendly a fashion. It was with plenty of confidence, therefore, that he entered her small private sitting-room and accepted her congratulations on his return.

"Griselda shall come to you directly," she said, as she reseated herself. "We don't dine for half an hour, and I'm not going to appropriate more than ten minutes of it. In point of fact, I can say what is necessary in two. Your engagement must be announced at once. I'm sorry to seem a little dogmatic, Mr. Dorset, but the situation has changed

since we last enjoyed a discussion together."

Harry saw an opening not to be disdained.

"Well, to be frank, Lady Southern, Annie betrayed the nature of the change. Am I to understand that my withdrawal would not be disagreeable to you?"

Her flush of consternation gave him considerable pleasure.

"Your withdrawal?" she faltered. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"What? Annie's wealthy ex-Colonel of Dragoons is a

myth?"

"Colonel Gorringe," she said, with what dignity she could muster, "certainly paid her some attention, but he retired at my first hint that she was not free to receive it.

It was one of those ridiculous ideas old men get into their heads at times. He sees the folly of it himself now, and, perhaps I ought to add, he has since seen some one more suited to companion him."

"In short, he has seen you."

She decided to cover her natural indignation with a smile.

"You are very quick," she said amiably.

"Well, so was he."

Lady Southern laughed with quite a creditable air of amusement.

"You're more flippant than I supposed; but now, come to business. When I allowed you a private engagement to Griselda I didn't realize how attractive she is and how easy it would be to dispose of her in marriage. I exaggerated, in fact, the mercenary tendency of the age. You must know, without my telling you, that you are not, even now, what is termed a good match, and you must know that my position as Colonel Gorringe's wife will permit me to give my daughter every chance."

Watching him cautiously, she became certain that alienation was the last thing he desired, and the knowledge gave her an opportunity for retaliation she was not slow to take

advantage of.

"There is no occasion," she went on more firmly, "for anybody to play the reluctant lover to Griselda. If there is a grain of hesitation in your mind concerning your own desire to marry, I beg you most earnestly to retire. Candidly, I should like to insist upon that retirement. I have no liking for you, but, though I'm a selfish woman, I'm not an unkind nor yet a self-deceiving one, and I'm bound to confess to you, as well as to myself, that you have touched her fancy. It is only a child's fancy, though, and I sincerely believe I could eradicate it. I should take her abroad—the Colonel likes life on the Continent—Paris, Monte Carlo, Cairo—oh, the round you know, from which we've been excluded so unfairly. It is for you to decide, for Griselda is altogether too emotional to recognize the common-sense side of the question. As I told you once before, I can pity

172 Dorset Comes into More Property

her though I can't understand the odd and impulsive rules by which she lives."

"Understand, at any rate," he said, with as much vehemence as even she could desire, "that there is not, and there never has been, any question of my retirement. 'The round,' as you term it, may suit you and Colonel Gorringe,

but it shall never be given a chance to suit Griselda."

"Oh dear! I'm afraid I've vexed you again," she murmured with mock plaintiveness. "I never do seem to say the right thing from your point of view, or Griselda's either. Of course, if you're sure you want her, I haven't a word more to say, except that the engagement must be announced in the ordinary way and the marriage ought to precede my own."

"Have you fixed a date for the latter?" he inquired,

with a return to his ordinary serenity.

"Colonel Gorringe talks of the autumn."

"Then shall I say July, if Griselda's willing?"

"And if you don't object to a quiet wedding," she added. "I infinitely prefer it, Lady Southern."

"Then I'll fetch Griselda."

But, near the door, she paused and looked back at him with an air of hesitancy.

"I know you don't credit me with any maternal feeling, Harry "-she spoke his name softly, and there was a hint of moisture in her faded blue eyes, the timely acquiring of which had been a study of her youth,—"but I've got enough to see the change that the past months have made in Griselda. She has been thinking during your absence, and I fancy-she makes me no confidences, you know-but I fancy she has turned up the unpleasant idea that it was pity, and pity only, that induced you to make that wonderful offer. You know best whether there was anything in your letters to arouse such a suspicion; but if you really want to keep Griselda, you must be careful. She's no longer the child who took your patronage with awe and gratitude; she's grown up. If she sees a trace of vacillation in your attitude—and her eyes are sharp, Harry—she'll refuse you;

not because she doesn't love you enough, but because she's learned to love you too well to take a qualified devotion

from you."

There was truth as well as subtlety in this speech. Lady Southern had kept a very discerning eye upon her daughter. Griselda had changed considerably during the last months, and, unless carefully protected, there was every chance that she would be tempted by her increasingly sensitive conscience to betray the fictitious rock on which her very real palace of sensation had been founded. She must be guarded yet a little longer from her dangerous impulse towards confession. Dorset was not old enough or experienced enough to be trusted with this girl-nature in all its complexity; his patience was limited and his pride was not. He must be kept from catechism; he must be infected with some degree of anxiety. And it was evident that Lady Southern's last words had done what she expected of them.

He stammered out something between an apology and a promise, and more than satisfied by this exhibition of weak-

ness, she left the room to fetch her daughter.

And, meanwhile, Griselda sat behind a locked door, waiting to be summoned, struggling with a host of contradictory resolutions. From the moment that Arthur Dorset's death had warned her of her lover's return, she had been the prey of self-torment and self-disgust.

"Shall I confess to him?"

The question revolved pitilessly through her brain, through much of the day and yet more of the night. A thousand times she told herself that there was nothing to confess, that her day with Glover had been but an insignificant act of revolt, that no real, or at least no illegal, interest had followed the tempter of the indiscretion; and a thousand times her reason was shouted down by a multitude of voices with no logic behind their shrill utterances.

Now it was the ignominious fear of detection, by means of her unrecovered letter, that faced her; now the protest of a naturally open and generous temperament. She wanted to start fair. She longed to tell the extent of her treachery,

174 Dorset Comes into More Property

to wrest pardon, and something more, from the man who wrote to her so coldly and dictatorially. When the moon rose and filled her sleeping-chamber with blue light, she was a fairy, superior to mortal laws and mortal limits; it became easy enough to win, in imagination, her momentous cause. But when the sun woke her out of fitful and insufficient sleep, the wonderful explanatory clauses that were to lash his intellect into comprehension had all flown away, and she was nothing more than a weary, pessimistic mortal, with a great many mistakes behind her, and a frowning and implacable judge ahead. For there was more than the tale

of a day's ride to explain.

There was the idle schoolgirl, learning all too readily the value of duplicity. With an impious finger she had prodded the pieces on the stage of that country house, and lives had changed their character, or at all events their direction. Alva had taken, all unsuspecting, the subservient rôle, and now, to her prompter, the action seemed terrible; like the movement of a vast army going by night it knew not whither, to destroy or to create it knew not what. Something slumbered in the great house that had been Griselda's cradle; it would emerge slowly but inevitably; and all the forces that must emerge with it, spiritual and material, could be traced back to one source—to the womb of a mischievous and idle mind. A step in the passage checked these excursions and alarms, so monotonously familiar. The girl leaned forward and peered into the mirror near which she sat. Her cheeks were paler than usual, and, involuntarily, she put her handkerchief to them and rubbed the color back. The speed at which it returned brought her a momentary thrill of reassurance. There was a story before which logic, law, responsibility went down. What was it? Where had she heard it and from whom? sharp rap on the panels of her door gave her the answers she sought. It was the story of such lives as her mother's, and, with a shiver of repudiation, she rose and crossed the room to admit the intruder.

"He's looking so well and so happy," the lady com-

mented, as she entered; but Griselda looked back, fearfully, into her animated face.

"Smooth your hair a little, take off that most unsuitable expression of melancholy, and come downstairs," Lady Southern commanded briskly.

"Not yet, mama. I haven't made up my mind what to

say to him."

"He won't ask you to say anything that requires consideration; I can promise that, Griselda. Why will you treat a very happy occasion with this ridiculous air of tragedy?" But she closed the door behind her in answer to that same disturbing air.

"Do you remember my visit to Miss Merry, mama?"

"Let me think. Miss Merry? Oh, to be sure; yes, just

after Alva's wedding. What about it?"

"I said I would go there to avoid the heat in London, but—but I went to meet Anthony Glover. He was the son of the lovely lady with the white hair, and, partly for that reason, I went up and talked to him at the wedding, without an introduction."

"Well?" said the elder lady impatiently.

"He was rather queer and attractive and—he asked me to meet him again, and I said no, but I meant yes all the time, and he knew it."

"Really, Griselda, this isn't the time for trivial reminis-

cences; Harry is waiting."

"It isn't a trivial reminiscence. I went to Miss Merry's because she lived near the Glovers, and I rode with him."

"Well, dear?"

"I let him talk to me-intimately, you understand?"

"Yes, yes."

"I let him kiss me."

Lady Southern laughed.

"Very indiscreet; but, if that's all you want to say, let me advise you not to keep Harry waiting any longer."

"But will Harry only call it indiscreet? That's the question, mama. That's what's worrying me to fiddle-strings."

176 Dorset Comes into More Property

She had purposely left the locality of the kiss indefinite, suspecting her mother's code of morals would be at least a peg below the common one, and curious to discover the common verdict on her conduct.

"My dear child, do you really, seriously believe that anybody marries anybody without an Anthony and a kiss of some sort behind the action? Do you suppose, moreover, that a man wants the bread-and-butter of complete ignorance for his life companion?"

"You mean he won't mind? he'll understand and for-

give?"

"Of course he'd forgive the fact, though not the utterance of it," Lady Southern declared, after a second's deliberation.

Griselda's face fell.

"That means you don't want me to confess, in case we lose him. You don't care about the justice or the injustice of the case, you only care about the gain or the loss in it, mama."

But the other was grateful for this frank outburst. It helped her to a course round which her mind had been

hovering.

"Listen to me, Griselda. Circumstances have altered considerably since our last serious discussion. I am going to marry a rich man who will be only too willing to advance your welfare. I shall be delighted to dismiss young Dorset"—the lie came out very easily and naturally—"he has never been a favorite of mine, and only our desperate situation made me accept his offer. That little insignificant country estate of his is a trifle compared with what I shall now be in a position to ask for you. I shall take you abroad with us, dear, and give you every advantage that your birth and my now full purse allows. You shall marry really well if you do all that I advise."

The horror she had foreseen and schemed for filled her

daughter's eyes.

"Break with him! Marry somebody richer! Go hunting abroad with Colonel Gorringe's purse! Why, mama, I love

him! I couldn't treat anybody that way, least of all him. How dare you ask me, you who told me to trick him into a declaration? I love him in spite of the trickery. You made me begin, and now you want to make me leave off; but I can't, and if I could I wouldn't. There are limits to my weakness and my meanness, and this is one of them."

Her mother concealed all signs of the satisfaction this outburst afforded her. She resumed her usual tone of

plaintive acquiescence.

"Of course, if you feel that way, dear, I shall put no pressure on your inclinations. I've told you before I'm not the mother of melodrama. But understand this-trust my experience of the world even if you won't trust me to choose you a husband: if you want to make this poor marriage, if you want to stick to that opinionative young man downstairs, you mustn't tell him any of the nonsense you've been telling me. He won't stand the name of Anthony Glover just at present; though I promise you he'll laugh at it easily enough in a year or two."

"Can't you be honest with anybody, mama?"

"Not with a man before marriage. They've too many prejudices, you see, dear. They've too much sense of dignity to keep up, and they've too little trust in your loyalty. You can tell your Harry anything you please when he's once learned the sincerity of your dependence on him. Now isn't there reason in what I'm saying?"

Griselda, deftly netted between love and fear, agreed to

find policy at least in the advice.

And her lover met her, as Lady Southern had promised he would. There were no inquisitorial utterances; there was, instead, an attitude not dissimilar to her own, an air of nervous excitement infinitely reassuring, and an absence of patronage highly encouraging, to the spirit of exuberance so long suppressed.

This was not the man who wrote the letters she had dreaded to open. This was the man with whom she had ridden and coquetted, the man who looked up at her in the dark stable-yard, with the light of youth and promise in his

178 Dorset Comes into More Property

green eyes. She was not afraid of him. He was young too. Was there, perhaps, a female Anthony and a kiss behind that vaunt of superiority which came and went, according to the degree, it seemed, of her proximity? She sat beside him, her hands imprisoned, answering the questions—the simple, inconsequent questions—he elected to put.

"And you turned up your nose at a wealthy Colonel of

Dragoons?"

"Yes; it's never come down again, Harry. What a delightful way of explaining its slight tendency to be retroussé!"

"Did he want you very much?"

"No; he didn't really want me at all. It was mama he wanted."

"Did you explain his mistake to him, Griselda, or did she?"

"I'm not going to tell you. You're too hard on mama as it is."

"There, you have told me. Are you always so trans-

parent?"

"Look right into me," she said on a sudden breath of optimism. "There's only one thing to be seen; do you know what it is?"

"No; tell me."

"My love for you. It's flowing through and through me, like a river, sweeping down all the old landmarks, leaving nothing—nothing of the horrid, foolish past."

"Why horrid, and why foolish?" he asked, with a lapse into his old air of disapproval; and hastily she curbed the

impulse carrying her towards exposition.

"Because you don't belong to it."

"I see; and when will you come, Griselda?"

"Come where?"

"To some desolate German forest with me, and, incidentally, of course, to the altar?"

"When you please," she told him with radiant simplicity

of look.

Dorset Comes into More Property 179

"What! without frocks or frills?"

"They'd be out of place in a forest."

"So they would. Shall we say three weeks to-morrow?" Lady Southern embarked with enthusiasm on the purchase of the trousseau, and Griselda was not disposed to grumble at the simplicity of the frocks chosen. The wedding was, of necessity, a private affair, and only a very

small gathering of relatives was present.

Sir Peter and his wife made an excuse Lady Southern hardly considered adequate or civil, but nobody else objected to the bride being given away by her future stepfather. In fact, the old gentleman's obvious reluctance to resign her, caused a titter of amusement to run round the wedding party, but for once Lady Southern refused to see a grievance, even though it flaunted itself audaciously beneath her very nose. She was to remarry into affluence; she was to shine once more in a somewhat dimmed fashion—but not beside the star of youth that had for so long threatened to eclipse her own. Griselda would retire into the country, to be swallowed up by rural pursuits, to be chained comfortably and securely to her horses and her dogs, to her autocratic master and her probable brood of children.

"You have chosen the better part, darling," the lady murmured, as she kissed the face beneath the plain traveling hat. "It is better to make a happy marriage than a great one"; and for once in her life she was trapped into

speaking the truth.

CHAPTER XVIII

FAIRIES AND FOOD

GRISELDA had her father's innate disdain for books and for the imprisoning walls where education commonly elects to sound her note; but she had, like that same father, a respect for the secrets of fervid life concealed among the pages of these despised books. At school she had managed to evade much of the information doled out in the unpalatable form of dates, and, from a scholarly standpoint, she was an ignoramus, but she was possessed of a quick mind and the assimilative propensity that permits its owner to attack lost ground with temerity.

Harry, on the contrary, had his historical facts, and many a savant's fancies at command, but he was deliberate in disgorging, just as he had been deliberate in acquiring. Knowledge spelled for him the power to worst antagonistic circumstances, and he had imbibed with it a smart dose of bitterness, which he re-offered, almost unconsciously, to all with whom he came in contact.

For a time it was inevitable that these tendencies of his should be at the mercy of his wife's picturesque betrayal of ignorance. For a time it was an agreeable novelty to laugh at her ebullitions of contempt for the bleak bones of learning. But it was equally inevitable that such an attitude should be temporary, and it was fortunate that she should unearth a suspicion of his fundamental disapproval in time to cope with its coming assault upon her happiness. Turning her clear but hitherto casual glance ahead, she foresaw occasions when this pretty trifling would irritate his temper and alienate his affection. Strange resolutions, foreign to the nature as yet revealed, began to throw shadows, not wholly mournful, across the brightness of the honeymoon.

She began to absorb more than the pleasure in her path. She found herself gradually assuming a dual rôle—that of the sportive child-wife, whose follies, carefully controlled, amused the man on a holiday, and that of the student, conscious of lost years behind and a stiff examination ahead. She learned to babble badinage over the varied objects of artistic or historical interest that came her way, while, at the same time, she rapidly and unobtrusively conned the main points in their construction, or the often complex story of their distinction.

She faced, if not the problem of entire reconstruction, that of elaborate alteration, and it was not to be denied that, as an individual, she began to assume power and point. All the caprices that had lent an air of enchantment to her personality were compelled to express themselves. The vain, delicately-tinted bubbles, composed of air and idealism only, were blown back to the element from which they sprang, but the color she preserved as gilding for her sounder fancies. And all this revelation of nature surged loyally about a single figure, that of the man she loved and deceived with such intensity.

For the first steady background to this human drama she had the giant pines and the simple cottage life of the Harz Mountains. She was supposed to have chosen this particular spot, and she could remember poring over a map, idly tracing with a lead pencil what she called "the eyebrows of Germany."

Harry, leaning over her, had suggested a trip to the Black Forest, and, involuntarily, she had cried out: "Oh, nothing black!"

Laughing, he had bent closer, guiding the pencil, fondling the fingers moving so submissively under his own, and together they had chanced upon the Harz.

"Full of fairies and canary birds," he had declared; and without discussion, it seemed to her, they had sailed from Southampton to Hamburg, en route for this unknown country, and mutually conscious that it was what they themselves brought to their environment, and not what they took from it, that really signified.

They had lingered in Hamburg for a day or two, in spite of the heat, and the absence of all the people of social import. These last had flown to the mountains, but their deserted homes still stood in brilliant gardens to enchant the gaze of the enthusiastic little bride. To row on the Alster in the evening; to tease the spoiled swans following the boat in hopes of provender; to watch the dimness descend like a veil over these scented gardens sloping down to the water's edge; to be wrapped in the warm darkness, and gradually to be wakened out of one's lethargy by the sparkle of point after point of light, until land and lake resembled a toy kingdom at festival time, seemed to Griselda the acme of pleasant existence.

Hanover, which was their second stopping-place, pleased her less, for she missed the water; and Brunswick, where they spent twenty-four hours, was positively distasteful. The museums wearied her, and the famous old pottery gave her no sensation but a desire to hold a trayful and let it drop on the stone floor. But in Goslar, where they made a last halt, she found much to please and amuse her. Here she recognized a charm in antiquity; the quaint houses with their strange mottoes served to recreate for her the people and the manners of the past, and it was with reluctance that she agreed to her husband's desire to move on.

Lauterberg was to be their goal; and dusty, hot, and a trifle cross, they arrived at the little hotel to which they had been recommended.

But they had resolved not to lodge at the "Kron Prinz." They meant to enjoy the privacy of a cottage on the hill, coming down, as was, they learned, the local custom, to

take the mid-day dinner of the place at the hotel.

With typical German disinterestedness, their host at the supper-table replied to their questions concerning the possibility of securing such a lodging, with eager interest. He called up his equally unmercenary wife, and, after some brisk argument, the "elegant apartments" of a certain Frau Schmidt were advised.

To Griselda's delight the landlord vouched that she would receive them that same evening, on his recommend, as she was in need of lodgers, and always kept her rooms and beds aired, in readiness for sudden arrivals. It was arranged that supper, as well as dinner, should be partaken of at the hotel, and a porter being provided and sent ahead with part of their luggage, the pair set off, shortly after nine o'clock, to their new abode.

It was impossible to miss the cottage, for it lay in full view, halfway up the long slope of pasture-land stretching between the village and the pine-woods, whose scent came down to them, pungent and sweet on the night air. A bright light burned ingratiatingly in one of its windows, and, lingering to allow the porter to get well in front, they made a dilatory journey upwards.

More than once Griselda called a halt, and, leaning on her husband's arm, turned to look back into the valley they were leaving.

"See," she said, on one of these occasions, "all the lights are coming out like glow-worms; soon there will be no patches of darkness left. How funny to think that each of those little yellow points is a home, happy or unhappy, young or old!"

"We'd better be getting along towards ours," he remon-

strated, far too carelessly to please her mood.

"You're not to look up at it in that way, Harry. It isn't a common lamp burning common oil. See—it's beginning to flicker; it's beginning to wonder what to give us—this first home of ours—peace or the sword."

"The sword, you dreaming girl? What do we want with

a sword?"

"Oh, we don't want it, but it's there, in every house. It's in the scabbard at first, but it must flash out some day, for a good cause or a bad one. Yes, I'm coming on, but not so quickly. We're to think, as we go, of the past and all its mistakes; we're to forgive, but not to forget; and when we get to the little door we're to tap on it, as beggars tap at that of a great landowner."

"And Frau Schmidt will say, 'Come in!'" he said, with

quizzical tenderness.

"No, no! Fate, through the mouth of Frau Schmidt, will say, 'Come in, Harry and Griselda, children of God's will and lovers of one another, and take what I am bidden to give you!"

Half infected by this gust of passion, and half distrustful

of it, he pressed her arm restrainingly within his own.

"It's getting late, and the porter will be waiting to be

paid."

"You're so calm," she said reproachfully; "oh, don't say you've been in before! Don't say it's just a lamp in a cottage window! It must be a mystery to you too!"

"I might be a widower, by the way you talk. Of course, it's a mystery, Griselda, only I don't want to exaggerate the

value of it."

She sighed, and let him draw her on and up the last steep stretch of incline.

On the patch of level ground where the tiny dwelling had been erected, they found the man with their boxes, arguing cheerfully with the landlady. Harry promptly added his excellent German to the discussion, but his wife was not altogether sorry to note that the other two seemed to have a difficulty in understanding it, their dialect being distinctly local, and not, Griselda thought, very unlike that of some of our English counties.

In time, however, the porter was induced to carry the boxes in (he appeared to have had doubts concerning the possibility of getting them through the doorway); he was paid and dismissed, and the visitors had leisure to examine

their surroundings.

The elegance of which the landlord had spoken was invisible to their no doubt insular eyes, but the rooms were spotlessly clean, and from each small-paned window one could look out into an undulating world of fragrant woodland.

Griselda's mind was tuned to satisfaction, and it agreed to find a virtue even in limit. It was with acclamations of enthusiasm that she noted the primitive German custom of stitching all the bedclothes into a bag, though familiarity

with it eventually bred disapproval, if not disgust.

The rooms, three in number, not counting a minute kitchen-sitting-room, were all on the ground floor, beneath a couple of attic bedrooms occupied by Frau Schmidt and her son, a wood-cutter in the forest above. The smaller of the three served Harry as a dressing-room, though his landlady seemed puzzled by his demand for it—in fact, throughout the visit she continued to mark her disapproval of such extravagant ideas on space, by replacing his washing-basin and shaving-glass in the sleeping room as regularly each morning as he removed them back at night.

Griselda slept the clock round on this first night in the mountains, but she woke to find her husband was going to outdo this performance. The room was full of sunshine, and, after a cursory examination of the few pieces of furniture, whose deficiencies were now so clearly defined,

she turned her attention to the window.

It had been furnished with a strip of muslin, wide enough to protect the lower of the two panes, but through the upper a clear view of the surrounding country could be obtained, and, no doubt, nearly as clear a view of herself and her sleeping apartment could be enjoyed by any passer-by.

But a second or two of consternation was all she allowed to the conventional strain in her blood. The pines were nearly black against the vivid and unflecked blue of the sky behind them; lower down, the sun sent channels of light here and there into the undergrowth, sowing its darkness with now a patch of emerald green, now a yellow pathway, twisting, like a broken length of ribbon, between mystery and mystery.

At intervals a peasant figure could be seen, threading its way through the alternate light and shade, lending an air of picturesque movement to the wonderful, rustic picture.

It was good to feel the vigor, born of long and dreamless sleep, inspiring one's limbs again; it was good to find the enigmatical little house of the previous night, that had twinkled so portentously, could bend to laughter and music, for the birds had not yet succumbed to their mid-summer silence, and liquid notes were blended with the monotonous song of the grasshoppers. But the great "choir invisible" was disturbed by the rattle of crockery, and Griselda discovered that she was abnormally hungry.

After a second survey of her still unconscious companion, she slipped out of bed, and proceeded to make a not very satisfactory toilet, as far from the window and the possibility of a prying glance as the limited space of the room allowed. She found a minute can of tepid water outside her door, and, with as much ingenuity and as little noise as possible, she set to work, distributing its contents over her person. Far from satisfied with her ablutionary efforts, but too ravenous to delay breakfast any longer, she slipped into the passage, followed the appetizing scent of roasting coffee, and found herself in the diminutive kitchen. But Frau Schmidt directed her by signs to the door of the sitting-room, and followed her in less than two minutes with the steaming jug.

She asked a number of questions, which Griselda answered in dumb show as best she could; but it was evident that the good lady failed to understand the tale of her second lodger's laziness—though she nodded and smiled with an air of entire comprehension—and indicated that the breakfast was served.

Left to herself, the visitor embarked cheerfully upon a dish of delicious white rolls, which she smothered luxuriously in butter, and disposed of with entire satisfaction. Only when the plate was empty did she turn a scrutinizing eye upon the rest of the contents of the table, to discover that she had sat down to her first typical German breakfast. There was nothing solid, not even an egg. The white rolls were supplemented by a block of what she learned later is called *fein Brot*, and a second block of even darker color called *Pumpernickel*, and regarded with national affection by the natives of the Fatherland. It was, however, the last article of consumption Harry would be likely to approve,

and hastily she made her way to the kitchen—there being apparently no bell in the sitting-room,—carrying the empty plate, which she begged by gestures eloquent might be refilled. But Frau Schmidt only stared open-mouthed, as at some monster of greed. It was plain she had no more dainty white rolls, and she was not yet aware that Harry had lost his share. In shame and dismay Griselda returned to the breakfast table to await the coming of the man she had so thoughtlessly despoiled. It was not a propitious start to the new life, and her gloomy foreboding that Harry would take this first domestic contretemps badly was fulfilled.

He came in as hungry as she had been herself, and he looked eagerly round for a bell with which to sound the fact that he was ready to face a good square meal.

There was no bell, and Griselda explained that what breakfast there was stood before him. The café au lait was still hot, and it was customary in Germany to breakfast off bread-and-butter.

His annoyance might have been vented on customs in general, and not on her, had he not discovered the fragments of her last white roll. Explanation brought, not the deluge, but an ominous silence. The young man ate his unpalatable food with all too obvious distaste; and when the landlady appeared to clear away the remnants of the feast, she embarked in a long conversation with him.

Poor Griselda recognized no single word employed, but she was convinced that her perfidy was under discussion that Frau Schmidt had heard Harry's late arrival and guessed his grievance,—and she feared that, though the two had a mutual difficulty in understanding one another's language, they must be at one inwardly in their conception of her conduct.

Only the unlawful possession of those five white rolls prevented her taking refuge from her misery in tears; but it was scarcely fair, she argued, to add dampness to deprivation, and she retreated to her own room to unpack, thankful to hide her face behind the lid of her trunk. When she

returned it was to find a change for the better in the atmosphere of the sitting-room, and during their morning stroll Harry certainly made an effort to dissipate some of the trouble from her face—as big a one, perhaps, as could be expected from a man suffering undeniable pangs of hunger.

As the dinner-hour drew near, however, the artificial quality in his returning good-humor diminished. He jested a little upon the folly of dining at mid-day, but it was with scarcely veiled eagerness that he urged her to set out for the hotel.

With half an hour to be filled in, they established themselves in the Cur Garten attached, and amused themselves by watching the arrival of other early members for the Mittagessen.

There were stout German papas and mamas, evincing inordinate pride in the doings of their lively and distinctly disobedient children. There were students, whose selfesteem appeared to be regulated by the length and depth of the marks of valor cut into their pale and often puffy faces. There were bare-armed nursegirls, with jaunty streamers of broad ribbon falling from their well-oiled plaits of blond hair, exchanging confidences with one another whenever their exacting charges left them an idle moment. There were maiden ladies, looking with disapproval, with resignation, or occasionally with a pathetic air of envy, at the antics of other people's children. There were little dogs of mysterious pedigree, displaying exaggerated friendship for, or enmity of, one another.

The garden was alive with egoism, but, when a gong sounded, this notoriously divisional quality of mind took

everybody for once in the same direction.

Griselda sipped her plate of soup nervously. For Harry's sake, she prayed that the German idea of a dinner should not resemble that of a breakfast, and she was speedily reassured.

The soup was sweet but not disagreeable; the fish had a piquant sauce, making up for its lack of flavor; then

came a dish of finely chopped macaroni-and-ham, which the starving Harry was good enough to approve; chickens followed the ham, served with excellently cooked vegetables, and, to Griselda's delight, little plates of yellow plums; a sweet called rothe Grütze succeeded, then biscuits, cheese, and butter, and lastly, but not leastly, piles of mountain strawberries, atoning amply for any restriction in size by their delicacy of flavor. In fact, the meal would have been an unqualified success, had it not been for the peculiar habits of some of their neighbors. At first it had formed a secret bond of amusement between the two to note such frank adult appreciation of the pleasures of the table. The delight of certainly three out of every five persons, when offered a new dish, was only rivaled by their reluctance to allow it to move on; but when this unfamiliar tendency began to affect the rights of a freeborn and remarkably hungry British citizen, the smile changed its character. Harry found it distinctly irritating to have the highly intellectual-looking woman on his left look from him to the dish before her, and, all too obviously, employ her powers of calculation upon his of consumption; her eye would pass on to Griselda, too, the last person upon her side of the table, and she would, just as palpably, accord a portion, and a very small portion, to her probable needs; the remainder—the great majority, one might truly have called it-she proceeded to ladle on to her own plate. Until the dessert stage was reached, a slight quantity of justice tempered this attitude, but at sight of the beautiful scarlet fruit, a gleam came into her eye, and the hand, reaching out for the spoon, trembled. When at length she resigned the dish, the straw-berries it contained would have failed to satisfy a sparrow. Harry stiffly refused to partake, and Griselda polished them off at top-speed, hoping to make her escape before an out-burst of hilarity should disgrace her forever in the eyes of these weird strangers.

CHAPTER XIX

MIST

A WEEK of sunshine was succeeded by another of rain, and for three days the young pair allowed their exercise to be limited to a wet scramble down the hillside and back

again at dinner and at supper time.

Part of the leisure thrown upon their hands was employed by Harry in teaching his companion to play piquet and double-dummy bridge. She was a complete stranger to cards, save for a long-ago acquaintance with "old maid" and "beggar-my-neighbor"; but, recognizing a new point from which to assail his appreciation, she embarked eagerly upon these games of mingled skill and chance.

It was amusing to outwit his estimate of her capabilities, and it was pleasant to angle for, delightful to secure, his half-grudged expression of admiration for her keen wits

and sound memory.

But after the three days she knew as much as he did, and possibly for this reason, possibly for a better one, he suddenly declared himself tired of the card-table.

Readily she followed him into the wet green woods, lit by no gleam of sunshine, and systematically they set to work upon the task of climbing all the peaks within reach.

From each summit they looked down on to melancholy cloud masses; they exchanged polite commiserations with wayfarers, intrepid as themselves, and returned at eventide too hungry to criticize the queer, but not ill-tasting, dishes their host at the Kron Prinz provided, and too full of mountain air and healthy self-content to argue very seriously over the fire of pine-logs that Frau Schmidt always lit on a chill night.

Griselda would have made a dozen friends in as many days had she been left to her own devices, but her husband had the national objection to forging any bond, however trivial, with the unknown; and though she contrived to temper this unsocial spirit to some extent, she was quite aware that the ground she tended would never accept freely of any cosmopolitan seed.

But what her gregarious nature lost her sense of humor gained. She could always laugh inwardly, and sometimes outwardly, when Harry was taken cordial possession of by a spectacled professor or a green-hatted artist, whose simplicity or good faith made him blind to the lack of reciprocal feeling exhibited by the young Englishman. It was funniest of all, she thought, when the unwelcome intruder on their independence was a woman, usually a schoolmistress, intent on extracting every atom of recreation possible out of her holiday. Her chief trouble was connected with her dread of seeing feelings hurt, and it was no light task to evade, with politeness and some attention to truth, the numerous invitations to join forces and purses with these friendly souls about her.

By dint of ingenuity, and some duplicity, their expedition to the Brocken was kept private, and on this occasion Griselda was as anxious to be unsociable as her husband.

The Brocken stands for a good deal of romance, and in more minds than the Teutonic. Round this spot, made famous by Goethe, by Heine, and by others of lesser fame, Griselda's imagination had hovered ever since her arrival in the mountains. She did not want to share her first impressions of the place with any ordinary tourist mind.

The day chosen for this expedition gave promise of being fine and clear, though the green land steamed after its late

bath and the air was chill as well as sweet.

Nestling in her warm wraps, the girl was glad of silence, for her heart was like some full cup at the moment, which could hold no further drop of sensation. The day hung for long afterwards in her memory. The sound of running water—for all the streams were swollen—could repaint it;

a mowing machine under the window of a Scotch house could reinvoke the musical song of the grasshoppers, who, in this fairy land, seemed to chant the livelong day and night. And yet, from a practical point of view, the climax had brought disappointment.

The mountain, in spite of the forecast of experienced weather-prophets, lay huddled in mist. Only very scant portions of the surrounding country had been visible during the long drive upwards, while the summit exposed nothing but those familiar masses of rolling vapor, cold as ice

and impenetrable as the future.

Griselda could utter, but, strange to say, she could not feel, a repulse of adventure. As she stood by Harry's side, it seemed to her fancy, inflamed, possibly, by the long spell of silent brooding she had been encouraged to indulge in, that she received what she had come for in negative fashion, and that negations held the soul and affirmations the body of great offerings. As she stared fixedly into it, the pallid vapor seemed to writhe about the forms of wonderful contingencies, and the secretive quality in the atmosphere gave ever increasing courage to the nervous spirit of intuition. Looking back, later, upon the hour and its ghosts, she felt convinced that another and a very important development of herself had been wrought from that nebulous breeding-ground.

Whether Harry shared with her any of these abstruse emotions, she had no opportunity to find out. He was taciturn as herself during the night spent in the little hut on the mountains and during the journey home on the following day. It was a silence that she felt to be fraught with content; but whether this content was with nature or with herself, she was not so tactless as to inquire.

But if this same mighty force of nature is, in her fastnesses, a thing of beauty and noble influence, there are ingredients in the force, which, under a microscope, present a far from lovely aspect. Griselda looking at the peasant children, with eyes growing tender for all forms of immaturity, could wrest little response from them, save an animal

appreciation of her sweets and her German pennies. Pitiful and curious, she turned her glance upon the parent force, seeking an answer to the indifference, and here she thought to discover a marital relationship, callous almost to the point of cruelty. Assuredly the peasant women worked as continuously and as uncomplainingly as the beasts they employed, and the older they grew, the more rigorously—so it seemed to this young critic—were they subjected to the law of physical endurance.

"The older the woman the bigger the basket on her back," she complained into Harry's not very sympathetic

ear.

Chancing one day upon a flagrant case of masculine tyranny, she determined to interfere, urged thereto by his satiric bet of four half-crowns to one that she would fail to improve the position for a single one of these female galley-

slaves, as her indignation was wont to term them.

She spent the greater part of a couple of days pursuing one after another, and engaging them in such intercourse as eloquent gesture could supply, but they seemed incapable of appreciating—even when they contrived to understand—the cry of revolt she sounded for them. They only smiled, or sighed, or scowled; wiped the perspiration from their hot, wrinkled foreheads, and, picking up the heavy baskets she had persuaded them to set down, went their wearisome way up or down the mountain.

It only remained to turn her attention to the tyrant himself, as the more intelligent force; and one morning she came to inform Harry, with considerable pride, that she had actually succeeded in inducing the old farmer with the cross red face, in the farm nearest their lodgings, to see the cruelty and unfairness of the way he had been treating his

wife.

"I pointed out to him, dear, that his pony (which I could see at the moment eating its head off) was the proper creature to carry all those loads of hay from his field to the out-house. It took a long time to explain what I meant, but in the end he understood. And he wasn't angry a bit. He looked pleased and grateful to me for interfering, and he nodded quite pleasantly, and promised me, by gestures, you know, that he'd do what I asked. It just shows that it's worth while to take trouble, even with a forlorn cause."

"I'm afraid the pony won't bless you," Harry was unkind

enough to reply; and her face fell.

"It oughtn't to be allowed to idle all day," she said, but

with a decrease of enthusiasm.

"Oh, it's not been idle," he further assured her; "it's only knocked off work a quarter of an hour ago. It's been carting gravel since nine o'clock this morning. I think the old gentleman's filling up a hole in his estate with public soil."

"Oh dear! I didn't bargain for the pony being overworked!" Griselda moaned. "However, I suppose it's

better than wearing the poor old woman out."

Exhausted by her endeavors to ameliorate the condition of the peasants, she took a prolonged afternoon nap, and woke at about half-past four to sounds which, at first, she took for the agreeable clatter of tea-things. They resolved themselves into the tones of human voices. Harry was being interviewed beneath her window, by a gentleman with the accent of the country in its most pronounced form. It was evident that there was misunderstanding, and she jumped up hastily, smoothed her hair, and hurried out to play the part of interpreter in dumb show—a rôle which she was beginning to fancy herself.

She found the ugly farmer and his tired pony, which had plainly undergone an unusual course of grooming, drawn

up in front of her husband.

"What does he want?" she asked.

"I'm not quite sure, but I think he wants me to buy the

pony."

The man turned eagerly to his old acquaintance, and began what certainly did seem to be an epitome of the animal's virtues.

"Buy the pony!" she repeated blankly. "Why, what could we do with it?"

"It's lean enough for a racer," Harry commented; but she frowned down the levity.

"I can't think what he means. He certainly promised me this morning that it should do all his wife's work. I

couldn't be mistaken about that."

"No, you weren't. It has done all her work; I've been watching it the whole afternoon. Now there's nothing for it to do, and he thinks he'd like to dispense with the cost of its maintenance. He wants to sell it to the kind lady who took such a fancy to it."

"But there are loads and loads more gravel to be carted," Griselda explained, in complete mystification. "I went to look as we came back from dinner. It will take days to fill

that hole of his."

"I'm afraid it will take even longer," Harry answered, his eyes on the far right, and a peculiar expression in them.

The man appeared to be waiting the result of this apparent conference with unimpaired cheerfulness. He brushed the pony's ragged mane, then looked expectantly from one face to the other. He supposed it would be the question of price they were arguing about, and he felt comfortably certain that, whatever they offered, the sum would be well in advance of the creature's value, considering age, ailments, and peculiarities of temper, with which he was only too well acquainted.

Harry took pity on his wife's perplexity, and, touching

her arm, nodded her to look where he was looking.

On the sun-baked patch of steep hillside, a figure was distinctly discernible. It was a female figure, and it moved slowly; there was a basket, as usual, on the bent back, but no mound of light green grass rose from out of it. As the meaning of the old farmer's attitude flashed into her consciousness, Griselda made a step in his direction; and so fierce and uncontrolled was the expression on her eloquent face, that, involuntarily, the fellow recoiled, and, as involuntarily, Harry rose and stepped between them.

"Don't make a fuss," he said quickly, "it won't do any good. He didn't understand. He thought you were point-

ing out to him the wastefulness of keeping cattle when a wife was there to do the rough work. No, don't cry; he won't understand that either. Go indoors and keep the tea hot, and I'll undertake to explain to him the nature of his mistake."

She looked uncertainly from one man to the other, then

a watery smile came to her lips.

"Mind you put the poor little beast back into the field, and—and I'd like you to put the poor little old woman straight into bed, but I suppose it wouldn't be proper. Don't make a muddle of it as I did. Make him wish he'd never been born," she added with fervency, as she turned to go into the house.

The farmer was puzzled to find himself accompanying the gentleman in the direction of his own homestead, but he concluded, in his still optimistic mind, that it was probably a question of a little harness, and he mused pleasantly on the amount he could ask for this addition. As they turned in at the broken gate, the woman appeared, with her heavy burden of soil; and the fury and astonishment of the old reprobate exceeded description, when the tall stranger crossed the yard, relieved her of the basket, tipped its contents into the hole, and in less than a second had dexterously fastened it to his own back. Nor was this the end of the indignity, for, picking up a sharply pointed pick lying within reach, he proceeded to prod the farmer uphill with it, at a pace to which his idle limbs had long been unaccustomed.

For over an hour he kept the wretch at work, compensated for his own exertions by the sight of the pony and his wornout mistress lying contentedly beneath the shadow of the one tree the farm contained. He had his doubts, of course, as to the ultimate gain these objects of his pity might be expected to reap from the illegal style of interference, and, when he finally released his victim, he could only shake an eloquent fist an inch from the man's red nose, and trust that a wholesome fear would keep cupidity, in future, from getting quite so far out of bounds.

Griselda received him with all the honor of conquest, though she had the effrontery to demand the four halfcrowns, or, rather, their German equivalent, to present to

her protégée.

It was certainly observable that during the rest of their stay in these parts, both the woman and the pony were permitted to take an afternoon siesta, in full view of the occupants of the cottage, but their champions did not remain very long in the neighborhood.

Time had appeared to fly in this rustic corner of the globe, and it was with an air of wakening suddenly to life that Griselda looked up one day from an English letter and

asked the day of the month.

"The twelfth," said Harry, so promptly as first to startle, then to trouble her.

Tears actually rose to her eyes as she looked at him and at that rare flush rising to his cheek. It hurt her pride to realize that for some time his thoughts and hopes must have been flowing another way than her own. It was not easy for a female mind, as inexperienced in social habits as hers, to grasp all that the twelfth means to a sportsman, and more especially one who can enjoy, for the first time in his life, the flavor of proprietorship amongst the birds.

"Are you vexed with me for not forgetting?" he said remorsefully, but she shook her head.

"No; I'm vexed with myself for not remembering. But

it isn't too late. You'll only miss a few days."

"I'm not in such a hurry as all that," he conceded, with qualified sincerity. "After all, I can shoot every autumn,

but I can't honeymoon so often."

"A honeymoon isn't a time; it's a feeling, Harry. One goes back on a wish, not on a train. You've gone already, and I was a fool to get left behind. No; I'm not cross or unhappy; see, I'm smiling. I love this little home of ours, but I shall love the other too. Now you're to describe it for me. You've told me next to nothing. Only that it has been done up, in welcome to me."

Charmed by this swift change of mood, added to practical concession, he embarked eagerly on a description of his house.

Mist

"You'll like the drawing-room, Griselda. White walls and a green carpet, with the skin of a big polar bear before the fire-place. The pictures are water-colors—sea- and landscapes, and rather excellent in their way. Arthur bought them just before the artist came into fashion."
"And the dining-room?" she inquired further.

"A capital contrast. When you want to have the blues comfortably, you'll retire into it. It's old; we haven't touched it—oak paneling, family portraits, some good bronzes."

"And the boudoir?"

"That's old too, but it's cheery antiquity. The walls are pink—a sort of brocade, a golden wedding present to my grandmother. They ought to be black by this time but they're not. The place is so clean, so free from chimneys and manufactures. There are shelves of books in white cupboards with glass doors, and cabinets of china, collected by that same grandmother and added to by my mother. There's a sofa so downy you could bury yourself in, and a view right over the garden and the paddock. It looks south, out of a big bay window, and you get the sun practically all day. It's your very own room; the rest of us only come in on an invitation."

"But I shouldn't be happy by myself. I'm terribly sociable. Haven't you discovered that?"

"Then you'll want school-friends, I take it?"

She made no reply, but she looked at him in a troubled fashion.

"They were in the bond," he said reassuringly; "I'm quite resigned to them. In fact, they'll be useful to amuse you while I shoot. I've sent one or two fellows down with their guns already, though I didn't mean to join them so soon."

Still she made no reply, only looked away, with an increase of distress.

"You told me it wasn't only for yourself you wanted

that house and horse, Griselda," he began curiously.

"No; it wasn't then," she whispered; "but, Harry, I'm more selfish than I used to be. I want these things to myself just a little longer; that is, I want you. Oh, I don't mean the men! They won't bother me; they'll be engrossed in their sport. But I don't want any of the girls about—not yet, I mean. They're children still; they'll want to talk about all the things I've outgrown. They'll expect me to be interested in all the gossip of the school, and I shan't be. I'm not the baby-girl who went to stay at Mrs. Fawcett's. I'm yours—only yours, Harry. Say you believe it."

Plainly she was asking him for more than a common word of reassurance and sympathy, but it was equally plain that he could not bring himself to give it. These excesses of feeling always roused in him a degree of obstinacy, and, quickly, she curbed her gust of passion and smiled at him.

"No. Don't say anything. It isn't time. On our golden wedding-day I'll ask you, not for wall-hangings of

pink brocade, but for compliments."

Fearful lest he should frown at this second lapse into sentiment, she leaned forward and pressed her round, soft cheek to his.

"And I'm going away to pack. You couldn't scowl at a wife who gave up, of her own free will, the last week of her honeymoon. You shall read the railway-guide—it's on the table at your elbow—for we start for home the day after to-morrow."

During those two remaining nights of forest life, she scarcely slept. The stars above that narrow strip of muslin magnetized her glance. At first there was fear and there was enmity in her look upward. Those winking and unwinking points of light were so cold and bright and knowing; they spoke so arbitrarily of establishment, of the survival of the fittest. They gave light to the earth, but they gave no warmth. It was patience, passivity, pitiless tenacity that set them high and unassailable, that linked them with the undying forces of the universe. But by slow degrees,

like a precocious child discovering odd flaws in the dogmatic reasoning of an elder, defiance crept into her blood. The warmth of her own heart, of her own cause, had penetrated those layers of nervous humility. Almost she laughed, so sweet and so ridiculous was the thought of standing up to those grim gods of experience, of setting against their harsh doctrines the kindly, human story inflaming her veins. And, presently, the defiance found phrases, a consistent argument, strong in its very simplicity. Man belongs to the law; but law belongs to nature, and to nature, in her turn, belong the countless antics that relieve the great, exacting, main movements of life. The lamb gambols and the bird sings with the same eternal persistence as marks the grave issues that make for enlightenment, and the child, crying in the night, whether for bread or for the stone, is as integral a part in the scheme of creation and evolution as any other expression of vitality. She was content to call her cause a claim to conquest by surrender, content to class it with the frailer things that may not stand alone; she was content to wait for the answer to that premature demand for complete love and understanding, convinced that the good seed had been sown and would burst in due season. She knew that he felt, though he would not own, that change in her from reckless girl to loyal woman; she knew that she had compelled him to question, more than once, what he himself had to offer to a temperament more subtle than he had expected, or, possibly, had desired, to companion. Lastly, she knew-and the consoling thought eventually lulled her to sleep-that on the dark memory of that debt in the past had been founded a relation that chance and her youth and her hot blood would never have established of themselves.

CHAPTER XX

THE MAN WITH THE SCAR

In November the two brides of the year came into con-

tact, though only for an hour or so.

Griselda had been brought to London, nominally to buy warm clothes, but, in reality, to satisfy a latent fear in her husband's mind lest the monotony of the autumn months should affect that unruffled air of serenity he had found so agreeable.

He had the cautious man's predilection for circumventing a possible, rather than battling with an established, ill, and she was by no means averse to the idea of a change of scene

at this particular time.

If she shut her eyes in these days, it was to see visions of the old doll's house at The Court; to find herself replaying the games of long ago with a new and strange zest. dead leaves, strewing the walks of her garden, crackled another tale than that of decay; she saw them green again, restored to the patient trees, in whose inky stems the sap for their nourishment was slowly forming. She had "the sound mind in the sound body" that reduces the sum of penalties demanded by nature for her great prizes, and she had-or thought she had-in addition, a more than common need for this coming disturber of the dual life. He was to tell that story of duplicity she had never brought herself to confess to the husband to whom she was, in spite of such close companionship, still so great, though so dear, a stranger. The boy-for he was always masculine to her expectant imagination—was to reveal everything in the condoning light of his mere creation. It seemed to her that controversy or ill-will would never dare to breathe the divine atmosphere of the future. It puzzled and it troubled her at times to find, occasionally, a morose or an irritable mood in this husband for whom fortune held so mysterious and beautiful a gift, but she was too quick with optimistic feeling to harbor any very serious germs of doubt or depression, and she was far from guessing the root of these lapses from cordiality.

The fact was, Harry was feeling, for the second time, the pinch of a need to calculate. It was a vastly different pinch to the original one, but it evoked disagreeable memories. It had been something of a shock to discover that economy belonged more decorously, but almost as arbitrarily, to the new condition as to the old. This was in part owing to that irrepressible demand in his blood for monarchy. He liked to scatter largesse among these dependents on his interest or his bounty, and, when Annie's allowance had been deducted from the proceeds of the estate, when a couple of tenants' cottages had been practically rebuilt, in response to importunity rather than necessity, the young landowner found himself inconvenienced occasionally by the sudden demand for money.

But it must not be supposed that he was a consistent damper to good spirits. On the contrary, impatience was the exception, not the rule. He made no objection to Griselda's request that Lady Southern should join them in London, where she was engaged in purchasing a trousseau, her marriage having been postponed until December, owing to a death in the Colonel's family.

Mother and daughter had not met since the latter's wedding, and Harry was aware, through a sympathetic instinct, that to the younger woman there had come a new interpretation of the term "motherhood," and no suspicion of neglect or double-dealing in the past could quite rob her of the notion that her baby was to gulf all forms of separation, however deeply imbedded in selfishness.

It was equally obvious to him that his mother-in-law's pleasant chatter and inquiries were so much surface talk, but he was glad to note that Griselda's shrewdness was for once at fault—that she listened with trustful and flattering

attention to the carelessly proffered advice. Lady Southern was completely engrossed in the purchase of a magnificent wardrobe, and it was typical of the ways of mother and daughter that no recollection of the very meager trousseau, chosen but a few months back, should trouble the memory of either.

The meeting with Alva was the result of chance.

Mrs. Dorset, driving in the Park in a hired victoria, saw her old acquaintance on foot and alone, running the gauntlet of public admiration with her familiar air of regal aloofness. Griselda contrived to attract her attention, and, in the end, to persuade her to return and lunch at the Metropole with her.

Alva had looked into the far distance, presumably in search of an excuse, but she had failed to find one. She was in town to interview her dentist, it transpired, but, not having supplied herself with an appointment, she had been compelled to accept an afternoon one. She finally agreed to spend an hour or so with her friend, and was driven away in triumph. But the exultant feelings did not last long. It was so plain, after a few minutes devoted to preliminary courtesies, that a peculiar barrier was rising between the two. It certainly did not emanate from Griselda, though she grew acutely conscious of it by slow but sure

Before very long there was almost as much fear as admiration in the glance she sent covertly out, whenever Alva's brown eyes wandered away into the cheerful bustle of Piccadilly on this bright November afternoon. An instinct told her that this gracious avoidance of intimacy covered some mysterious movement of the mind, and that the absent sweetness on this fair face had another trans-

lation than would be given by the casual observer.

Possibly this suspicion was born of the other's attitude towards the secret, divulged with such artless pride and such confiding promptitude; possibly the initial mother read into those too lightly, too prettily worded congratulations an unnatural and alarming refusal to acknowledge the

divinity of nature. Arrived at the hotel, it was certain, at all events, that to Alva each lovely garment displayed spelled no more than elegance of stitching or design, while her gracious words of approval, like her gracious self, left no inch of space on which to erect a protest. Testing other ground in her pursuit of this elusive quarry, Griselda learned that The Court was looking lovely in its autumn coat; that the neighbors were as amiable, as hospitable, as ordinary as was to be expected; that Peter was quite ridiculously busy with meetings and deputations and village libraries and what not, and that Alva herself was luxuriously idle and completely satisfied with her state.

There was no flaw to be detected in the armor of this complacent avowal, and yet, against logic, the doubt in the questioner's mind seemed actually to feed upon this repulse of curiosity. She became conscious of an increase, instead of a decrease, of anxiety, and, after a while, she even began to suspect that her companion was aware of her peculiar distress, and took a furtive pleasure in feeding it. It was, eventually, as though some shrouded form stood between the two, and the languid mistress of the occasion dared her nervous friend to give it a name.

"Yes," her smile appeared to say, "your instinct is right; I am something more than the wife of your cousin or the mistress of your old home. I am not afraid to be chris-

tened, but you are afraid to christen."

Griselda tried to reassure herself by explaining the enigma in a practical fashion. She called this train of sinister thoughts the emanations from a sensitive conscience; but she was relieved when her mother's return altered the tone of the conversation, reducing it to a very mundane and sartorial level.

When the visitor had gone, she stitched a little, laughed a little at Lady Southern's droll recital of the delinquencies of various dressmakers and milliners, and soon found her equanimity restored.

She went up, presently, to her bedroom, to discuss with Joanna what she should wear that same evening at the

theater. Joanna was a buxom country girl, enjoying her jaunt to the gay metropolis almost as much as her mistress. She was by no means an ideal maid, but Griselda was not fastidious on the subject of hair-dressing, and, indeed, simplicity suited her curly locks far better than elaboration. And then Joanna was so strong and so willing, making up in good temper what she lacked in French polish.

But her round, rosy face looked a trifle worried this afternoon, and she was lingering in her mistress' bedroom, ap-

parently with the desire for an interview.

"Is anything the matter?" Griselda inquired; and the girl looked grateful for the opening provided.

"It's about Jim, ma'am."

"Oh, dear! I might have guessed a 'Jim' would turn up to spoil all my plans. You're engaged, of course; and I did so want you for baby's nurse! You're just the sort he'll be sure to like, Joanna."

"I've been engaged since before I come to you, ma'am, but we aren't in no 'urry, Jim and I, only—only—" She stopped, and began twisting the strings of her apron round

her fingers.

"Only what?"

"Well, ma'am, Jim wants to better 'isself. 'E's bin hostler down in Sussex, and 'e come up to town to look for a better place, and—to see me. 'E come jest as you and the master were drivin' off to the theater, and I pointed you both out, and—and—I couldn't but tell 'im there was talk of Craddock leaving our stables—and we didn't see, ma'am, but that you might be willing to take Jim on," she finished wistfully.

A hostler from Sussex roused no more than a vaguely disturbing memory in Griselda's mind; it was just strong enough to prompt an unsympathetic answer to this ap-

peal.

"Craddock only gets a pound a week; he's not head man, you know. I doubt if Jim will find any bettering in such a post."

"Oh, I told 'im the wages, ma'am, and 'e was satisfied.

It's more by five shilling than 'e's bin getting—and then—there's me, ma'am."

"But I've nothing to do with the stables," her mistress

further objected.

"No, ma'am, but you've to do with me, and I've to do with Jim, and Jim's to do with stables," the girl argued, and Griselda had to laugh.

"All right, I'll put in a good word to Mr. Dorset, but you

mustn't be too sure he'll listen to it."

"Oh, but Jim wants perticular to speak to you, ma'am."

"What in the world about?"

"His qualli—qualli—fications," the girl told her, evidently repeating the word with difficulty and pride.

"He must tell them to Mr. Dorset."

"No, ma'am, please ma'am; 'e says 'e must tell them to you first."

Again that sense of disquietude, too faint to be called fear, ran through the listener's mind, and she answered sharply:

"But that's ridiculous; I shouldn't know if he suited the

place or not."

Joanna resorted to a new method of argument.

"No, ma'am," she said meekly and mournfully; and she put the corner of her black sleeve to one soft, wet, brown eye. "I'll tell 'im it isn't no use. It isn't right to bother you—not well and all—with our troubles. And it isn't no use to go to the master, for it's certain 'e won't take to Jim without your good words. Strangers don't never take to Jim—men, that's to say, ma'am. Women takes to 'im fast enough, and I'll jest 'ave to lose 'im, as many's lost their lovers before and will again." And this outburst of philosophy ended in sobs.

"Oh, Joanna! of course I'll have to interfere if you care all that much; but if your Jim isn't likely to be faithful, why—why—" She paused, fearful of hurting the

girl's feelings.

"I'd like 'im under my own eye, ma'am."

"But don't you trust him?"

"Oh, yes," the girl assured her, "of course I trust 'im, but it's better to 'ave 'em near you, trust them ever so."

"I see; well, cheer up, and tell me when and where I

can see him."

Joanna cheered up without an instant's delay.

"This very minute, ma'am, if you're so minded. Jim's downstairs waiting to see if you'd agree to speak to 'im. Would you let 'im come up to your private sitting-room?"

"But Lady Southern's there."

"It wouldn't matter to 'er, ma'am, one way or another; and then you could speak to the master right away when 'e gets in."

Joanna was evidently an advocate for striking the iron when hot, and Griselda caved in before this spirit of deter-

mination.

"Well, fetch him up, and I'll see what he looks like any-

way."

Lady Southern was writing letters when her daughter joined her, and she made no objection to the hostler's intrusion.

When he entered, Griselda had her face to the window. She listened to the rough voice bidding her "good afternoon" with a peculiar thrill of the nerves. It touched no chord of memory, and when she turned to look into the man's face, that too was, for the first moment, reassuringly unfamiliar. Then, as his eyes met hers, an increase of color rose to his cheek, and, retreating again, left visible the mark of the whip. Wind and weather had pretty nearly obliterated it, but it showed, apparently, in moments of excitement, and this was such a one. As she stared steadily at this single enemy, there ran through her mind a full consciousness of the danger threatening her peace. In the fellow's expression she read recognition and animosity; in the message delivered so unsuspiciously by Joanna, she was now enabled to read a threat. Nothing but the possession of her lost letter, and some sort of comprehension of its significance, could explain the man's attitude.

"I'll tell my husband what you have said," she found

herself promising, with quite a creditable air of indifferent patronage. "It's still doubtful if our groom leaves us, and it's also doubtful if Mr. Dorset will want to have a man from the South. He likes to employ Scotchmen off the estate, whenever possible."

"I suppose I may count on your good word, ma'am?"

"Well, you see, I've nothing to do with the stables, as

I've explained to Joanna."

"He'll take me on, ma'am, if you wish it," the man said; and Lady Southern, who had looked up to listen to the argument, murmured a word that sounded like "impertinence."

Jim turned to look at her, and back again at her daughter, and now his expression said very plainly: "She's talking off the book, isn't she?"

But Griselda had picked up a little courage with her in-

dignation.

"You're taking a very dictatorial and unsuitable tone," she said firmly. "For Joanna's sake, I've promised to say what I can in your favor, and there, of course, the matter ends."

"Yes, ma'am, for the present," the man answered imperturbably, but with restored civility. He turned to leave the room, with a polite salute for each lady in turn.

As the door snapped behind his back, Griselda dropped her head upon her hands, and Lady Southern hurried to her side in some astonishment.

"You're ill, dear?"

"No, mama, only wretched."

"As if that lout's impertinence mattered!" said the elder lady scornfully.

"But it does matter." Griselda raised a white face to

make this astonishing statement.

"You're talking Greek," Lady Southern said irritably.

"Mama, do you remember my telling you about Anthony—and the kiss?"

"To be sure; and you will remember I told you how

little they signified, dear."

"You were wrong. They did signify—at least, they're

going to."

"What? Some one has made mischief? You were never silly enough to confide in anybody but myself, were

you?'

"I wrote a letter," said the girl dully. "I wrote at night, with the moon looking in at the window. It was a mad letter. I was playing with words and ideas I knew nothing about. I talked about renunciation, because I never had a chance before, and it was such a fine big word. Mama, you can't believe the nonsense I put in that letter. Anybody who really understood me would laugh. Anthony laughed himself. But Harry doesn't understand me; I haven't dared to let him try. When Harry reads it there will be a tragedy."

"We don't have tragedies in this century," her mother

objected.

"Well, we have comedies with very unpleasant situations in them."

"But why should Harry read this letter? And what has all this to do with the man who wanted a situation?"

"You may well ask, mama. But it's the spirit of misfortune or the spirit of fair-play that gives the answer; I'm sure I don't know which. I only know that I'm frightened and miserable. That man saw me the day I rode with Anthony. He made me angry, or rather, I was angry to begin with and he made me worse; I struck him with my riding-whip. The mark is still there, and so is his desire for revenge. He hates me, and I'm almost sure that fatal letter is in his pocket. He wouldn't have dared to speak as he did without it."

Lady Southern showed a degree of perturbation.

"Try and remember exactly what you wrote, and repeat it to me."

"The words have all gone, mama, and no wonder, seeing that they only came out of a child's fancy. But the sense I can remember. I was remorseful. Anthony was unprincipled, the villain of melodrama, you know, and Harry

was outraged. Think, just think of his reading such a story, at the instigation of such a man, and there's no alternative, except to tell him myself. You told me I would be able to tell him anything in a little while; but it isn't true."

"Now, Griselda, don't be childish. Tell me how this

fellow got possession of a letter sent to Mr. Glover."

"He dropped it on the road—Anthony, I mean—out of the pocket of his shooting-coat. He went back to hunt, and he only found this man, lighting his pipe by the side of the road. He didn't dare to ask questions, for fear of rousing curiosity, for we both knew he would welcome a chance to hurt me."

"But, my dear girl, such a document as you describe would be absolutely unintelligible to a man of that class,

even if he recognized the names on it."

"That's what Anthony said, mama, but not very confidently. You see, he had a very big grievance; he wouldn't take money for it. He might have guessed by Anthony's silence, too, that there was value in the letter. He may have taken it to some one to translate, and there would be plenty of people to find a horrid, untrue story of intimacy, at least, in it. I suppose I'm superstitious, because I've always had, at the far back of my mind, the fear that this would happen. I've always meant to tell and never had the courage. I thought I was to have my own special pleader, and—and—he hasn't come in time. It isn't fair! But yes, it is; it's pitilessly fair. One has to pay for everything."

Miserably she looked up, not into her mother's deliberating face, but into the life ahead, forcing her brain to enumerate the points for and against acquittal, should she be called on to face, thus unprepared, the court of judgment so long evaded, and pessimism ruled her emotions for the time. Harry would judge the wife he had educated, not the girl-sinner of the spring. He would forget that it was he who had laid upon her a restraining finger, damming the natural stream of candor, molding her to that favorite image of his profane taste; leaving her thus,

in her hour of need, a hopeless and artificial force at the mercy of a vindictive natural one. There were excuses, hundreds of them, surging about her memory, but he would never listen; he never had listened to anything but the echo of his own benevolently arbitrary voice.

Lady Southern spoke peremptorily.

"This is all very tiresome and unfortunate, but, as I said before, it isn't tragedy. Of course you want to choose your own time for making a little confession of this sort, and of course the time is not far off when you can do it safely and comfortably enough."

The lady had no desire to have her visit spoiled by a domestic scene, and she set her wits to work on averting

the unpleasant possibility.

"You must engage that fellow, as groom, gardener, odd-man—anything, to keep him quiet for the time being. You must play your interest in Joanna for all it's worth."

Griselda shook a despondent head.

"Harry wouldn't understand what I was driving at."

"But don't you see that you can bewilder him as much as you please just now? Be illogical, be inconsistent, perverse, hysterical. If he can't find the answer we require to the riddle, he'll have to turn to me and I shall translate."

Griselda stared at the speaker in a sort of puzzled horror.

"What answer to what riddle, mama? You're always so mysterious."

"And you're so obtuse on certain points, child. Don't you know that, just now, you've a right to vagaries of mind?"

"No. I think—that is, I thought—that I'd less right than usual."

For the moment Lady Southern was silenced, then she

broke out again.

"You're being absurd, Griselda. Your whole future comfort is at stake now. If you want to play the slave for the rest of your days, you are going the right way to work. A man's readiness to take is always in advance of a

woman's readiness to give. Harry will be astonished if you make a fuss-well, that proves pretty conclusively what sort of a basis your married life has been founded on. He ought to be astonished, dismayed even; he's far too sure of your amiability, far too sure of your moods. On the whole, I'm not sorry for this opportunity to show him you are not entirely under his thumb."

Griselda looked quite incapable of exhibiting independ-

ence.

"We're so happy as we are," she murmured weakly.
"Oh, in that case, my dear, surely this scene you're

treating me to is rather farcical."

"Tell him!" said Griselda, softly and absently to herself, not to her bridling companion. "Tell him now, while I'm weak and nervous! I can't—I daren't. It will be easy by-and-by, when the miracle has happened. I hate your way, mama. I hated it before, but I went, and I shall have to go again, because I care so much. I'm to be cross to-night-cross and unreasonable and obstinate, and, if necessary, hysterical; and if he doesn't understand-and, poor boy! I don't think he will-you will step in and translate. It's another plot between us. It seems to me, mama, plots are the only things that bind you and me together. There, that's his whistle, and it means, with him, a very specially good humor. Providence on our side, on the side of intrigue and meanness; what an abominable moral! Don't go away, mama. You're my accomplice. Without you the plot would fall to pieces. Oh dear! the hysteria is coming too soon! I want to laugh and cry already."

"Joanna is betrothed to the most unpleasant looking person it's ever been my lot to look upon," the new-comer remarked, as he entered the room. "I chanced upon their farewell, and Joanna bustled after me to explain the gentleman and to invite my sympathy. She spoke of yours"he looked quizzically at Griselda—" as already enlisted on their behalf; but, if you've seen the fellow, I'm afraid you've been sacrificing truth to politeness. Now what have

they been asking you to promise and vow in my name? Come, own up."

Of the scene that followed she never retained any very clear impressions. Like a nightmare the memory of it hung about her—a medley of sharp or caustic utterances, a brief, but horrid battle of words, of opposing wills. She could remember that, at an early stage, hysteria had been called in, and Harry had not turned to his mother-in-law for translation. His antagonism had decamped promptly, far too promptly to please her better nature, and she had found more than adequate punishment for her duplicity in the changed quality of his glance.

"Oh," it had said, clearly enough to her sensitive and remorseful fancy, "I can yield with honor, with dignity, to the ordinary wife—to the embryo mother; but you must forgive me in that I was slow to class you with the common—the unbalanced herd. There was much to forget, something to reconstruct. Yield your common-sense for the doubtful benefit of your maid; take that lout for a groom, but take, at the same time, my new and lesser estimate of

yourself."

She went to no theater that night. She pleaded head-ache, though heartache would have expressed her ailment more truly, and she lay on her sofa, having persuaded the other two, not without difficulty, to leave her, and tried to gauge the amount of bitterness concealed in her victory, tried to calculate how far Joanna's lover would be likely to carry his twin desires for vengeance and advancement.

CHAPTER XXI

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF EARLY RISING

ALVA was alone in the railway carriage bearing her back to her home, for Peter had been compelled to remain for the night in London on business connected with his estate.

She passed at express speed through tracts of land, clad in a gorgeous death-robe of russet tints, and she saw the beauty and not the corruption in the wonderful panoramic picture spread before her. Her eye, like a bird circling whither it would, forward or back, found pleasure alike in its own motion and in every feature of the landscape, though, before very long, the autumn twilight had wrapped the country into which she gazed in a dull mantle. But, for her, the colors only grew more intense, for summer thoughts and summer hopes were in her breast and lent to her face that radiance that had disturbed the serenity of her friend an hour or two before.

It was mainly into the past that she peered with those long strange eyes, and with the past she had no quarrel.

All and more than expectation had promised had been given her with the gray house upon the hill. With what ease, what ecstasy, had the bones of history been revitalized by her own fervid imagination! At her first call the semblances of bold men and beautiful women had flocked to don the guise of actuality. The painted boy, who had died for a king, or perhaps more often for a queen, was all too ready to accept the breath of life, while the lady who never lost her likeness to a modern unknown, kept her spell with her secret, and stared back at the new mistress of her house with a mocking charm, at eternal war with satiety. And in the window of the Gallery sat the great marble woman with her chin upon her hand, musing upon the for-

tunes of the Southerns past and to come. When, here and there, a dark idea crossed the mind of this visionary, it was, invariably, to act as foil to the general brightness. That hint of solitude and chill that had infected her dreams in the early days of home-coming had never intensified, for egoism protected her at all points from disappointment, promising her that every need, so soon as it reached maturity, should find its saviour.

And the task of eluding a husband in all save frankly material ways, had become easier instead of harder as time went on; a delicate quality in his temperament as yet foreign to hers, inducing him not only to accept, but presently

to invite, the very distance she desired maintained.

She had a qualm or two as she felt his fetters slacken, but the relief was too great to allow her to protest with any vehemence, and he was too proud to plead for rights the dictionary does not class or the law define. Soon she was left to the companionship of the librarian and her old nurse. For Calder she had curiosity, for Minnie a patronizing order of affection. She talked to both, for the man had a head and the woman a heart, while neither made undue demand on her own emotions. Calder came by degrees to regard her as illuminative, seeing in her gracious callousness and picturesque selfishness some sort of landmark, descriptive of the human country from which he had so long exiled himself. As for Alva, she chose to see in their relationship the natural though circumscribed sympathy of two significant forces. They were extremes—he a man dealing with facts, she a woman dealing with fancies. She would have insisted, had she been urged into expression on the subject, that they had both extracted from existence the individual sting-Calder because he desired to feel and submit to nothing, she because she desired to feel and submit to everything-of course in the sensational line. He scheduled the tendencies of humanity, she embosomed them; he wrote the catalogue, she lived, in imagination, the myriad possibilities it contained, in joyous defiance of the common law and the common limit. In her wilder mo-

ments she saw the old man forgotten by time, his lack of personal feeling acting as an invisible cap; she pictured the scythe of the Reaper powerless to deal the fatal stroke to a being toneless and intangible as the air he breathed.

The merging of August into September had brought the new actor upon the scene, and, looking out now into the darkness, her smile deepened at the recollection of his entrance. She reviewed that early morning prologue with a satisfaction untouched by any sense whatsoever of regret or self-distrust.

The Court was full of shooting men; she had wished it, though she, like Griselda, had drawn the line at female invasion. She had been content that Peter's interest should be distracted from herself and from that unclassified form of revolt then fully embarked upon. The babble of tongues served to drown the note of their disunion.

She had risen early, a habit taught by her grandmother and not discarded with the majority of that lady's precepts. She had drunk her cup of tea and wandered down to the banks of the trout stream, glittering invitingly between the branches of the great trees that bordered it. Her mind that morning had been a veritable pleasure ground, set out in attractive fashion to catch and delight the eye of any chance visitor.

She told herself that she had always felt ahead the advent of a new emotion, and, assuredly, she had taken quickened pulses to that particular walk beside the river.

That her stranger should be fashioned, outwardly, somewhat on her own lines—long and gracious lines—was a slap at the theories of the common deducist, who hugs so tenderly his argument concerning the mating of opposites. The young man, whose soft whistle gave her warning of his approach, was nearly as blond as herself, but it was with unquestioning approval that she looked him over.

"You are trespassing," she said, as the whistle died on his shaven lip, and quickly, winningly, his smile had an-

swered to the sparkle in her eye.

"I'm caught, and by Lady Southern herself. The punishment doesn't fit the crime."

"You shall be forgiven, if you tell me what brought you here."

"Suppose I can't tell you that?" he ventured warily.

"If I were to speak of arbitrary spirits of the woodland,

you'd call it nonsense, of course."

"I might, and again I might not," she replied, with obvious enjoyment of the turn his tongue had taken. "It would depend entirely in what language you described the prompting spirit."

"Whether I proved him kin to yours," he said, too mus-

ingly to court repulse.

Half frightened and half enchanted by this confidence of bearing, she had temporized with her fancy and her pride.

"It's a pretty name—the spirit of the woodland," she said gaily. "I wish they gave us the same sort, but they wouldn't be distinguishing enough, would they? I'm Alva Southern; you know that—and you?"

Her lifted eyebrows finished the question for her.

"Shall we say Faust? He was an adventurer of sorts!"

"He was a betrayer too," she hazarded.

"And last, not least, a lover. Wasn't it significant that he reversed the usual order? Love, the real thing, fol-

lowed—it did not precede—betrayal."

She had winced a little at his topic, at his easy handling of it, but curiosity had curbed the impulse to subdue him, and she was lost, from the moment, to convention at least. Plainly this person belonged to her own class, and, as plainly, he was versed in her favorite language. He knew the scope of ambiguity, the width of insinuation, and he was not afraid to inflame either into adventure when he saw an advantageous opening. She had spent a full hour in rapid thrust and parry, in close intercourse with a nature that appeared now to prompt and now to follow the impetus in her own. She became aware that she rode without a curb, and side by side with a companion at once familiar and foreign to her intelligence. Now he startled

her by the weight of his sympathy—it was almost as though their estimate of a principle sprang from a common source; then, suddenly his antagonism was playing about one of her favorite prejudices, and she was defending it with an enthusiasm never before called into action by a fellow-creature.

Learning his name and such of his history as he deemed it expedient to tell, it was inevitable that his influence over her licentious imagination should be increased. The son of Gwenny, well-shaped and easy-spoken, coming at the psychological moment, when ennui threatened to touch the dear form of illusion, had little to fear from that stifled force, her conscience. She could recall (and, with a slight wrinkling of the brows, she did recall) a couple of recoils—a pair of semi-reconciliations with Peter, but on each occasion that fatal tendency in him to play the grateful slave, rather than the outraged master, had ruined his cause; and, if an angel drove her towards these two impulses of confession, there were seven devils of perversity to drive her back again, in the direction of her only half-explored Bluebeard's chamber.

That she and Glover handled pitch in the propagation of this intimacy went without saying, but there was a single element of excuse for them in a vague, but dominating, mutual sense of freedom from common risks. Each had the inward conviction that a unique quality of mind—an uncanny triumph over sex—lent to their association, not only immunity from danger but a positive flavor of virtue. They saw themselves released, for a time at any rate, from the common law. Neither was afraid to note or to approve the physical perfection of the other; perhaps because a yet warmer sense of self-appreciation protected the situation.

They met often, and with ever increasing confidence, with ever increasing delight in the mental audacity of the other.

Alva did not need to close her eyes in order to see again the green meadow-land beside the trout-stream. So practised was she in the art of recreation that she could almost

breathe the mist of morning rising from the river-bed to half conceal their two slow-moving forms. Again she could inhale that first faint challenge of coming winter that had met her, as she slipped down, from the terrace to the garden, from the garden to the trysting-place.

And to Anthony, she knew, this gift of intercourse was no less welcome, though she little guessed how sordid and how cynical was the state out of which she, for the time, seduced him. He mused too, in these hours of separation,

but he mused darkly, treacherously.

More disappointed than he cared to own to himself at Griselda's repulse, he had spent dejected months learning the limit set to the most ingenious—the most profane spirit. The "so far and no farther" of philosophy soured his temper without widening his view. The sages, whose lore he studied, could only repeat for him a tale too greedily, too prematurely absorbed. Fast in the toils of hereditary bitterness and morbid habit, he could find no better God than the elaborately artificial image to which he had so long accustomed himself to bow. Like the beast, his head was towards the earth, and it had become a second nature to pore over the intricate map of human frailties, to follow the distorted lines from their grim source to their yet grimmer bourne, to drug, though never quite to destroy, the germ of intelligence confided to him.

Circling about for novelty in his patch of ground, he chanced upon an old habit, and rewoke some of the enthusiasm he had once felt for it. He took again to trespass, though with more respect for convention. He resumed his early morning rides in the direction of The Court, leaving his horse (or it might be his bicycle) with the protégés foisted upon him by Griselda, and established, so it happened, in the near neighborhood of her old home, on the grounds of which Anthony had found the man work.

Wandering by the river he would look up at the great house, and muse lazily upon the attributes, material and spiritual, that go to the construction of these so-called landmarks of social power. At times, in lighter moods,

he would let meditation trifle with the temperaments or the fates of the two women whose youth and beauty compelled in him a degree of interest.

At first Griselda haunted the place, troubling him as the sudden approach of death troubles an avowed atheist. She was so aggressively sentient, so radically at odds with his theories. She was a gipsy, her wildness enhanced by that hint of religious feeling of which he had caught stray glimpses. On the stillness her voice would come to him: "I could find the sermon in the stone"; and, at the memory, he would wince, for that sermon was the last he wished to seek or find.

He was glad when he began to catch visions of Alva, walking far above in her rose-garden. She distracted his mind and fired his stagnating imagination. She had never spoken to him. She was no more than an image, white and gold and infinitely graceful, passing down a village church upon the arm of an essentially prosaic bridegroom.

Anthony had recognized, instinctively, a subdued denial of the common acceptation of the common lot in her attitude. He, at least, saw a travesty in the ceremony that bound her to marital law. He made, however, no effort to substantiate his theory, no effort to come into touch with the new mistress of The Court.

Perhaps he saw in the calling-card the natural enemy of the only relation he cared to establish; perhaps his egoism, like Alva's own, was audacious enough to promise him the due fulfilment of his peculiar demand. At all events he was content to remain below, content to wait till her passion should drive her down, down to where he wove, so patiently, so confidently, the web destined to entangle her.

Her cordial greeting had been no surprise, and at close quarters she promised yet more eloquently than through the magic haze of distance. Almost from the first he had recognized the coming surrender in her eyes. Let him work cautiously, and she would infallibly accept all that he meant to offer her.

In the past intrigue had been expensive, but to his unique companion there was no price attached. According to his code she taxed neither pocket nor morals. Her need was precisely the counterpart of his. The scale of demand and surrender hung dead level. It was now a war, and now an idyll, of wits on which they embarked. Mutual daring raised many a wall impregnable to the solitary mind, and tracts of new land became visible.

Lines of temperamental divergence gave piquancy to every adventure. There were feminine recoils to flatter the autocracy of the man, and masculine limits to the force of fancy, to foster the cry for occasional supremacy in the woman. Alva could fly the higher, but Anthony could grope the deeper, could turn her fairies into monsters, hydra-headed and cruel, shaped to play poignantly upon the nerves of a creature so dependent upon the extrava-

gances of existence.

It seemed to the young man that no serpent, save the vulgar fear of detection, could ever creep into his garden. The dense and friendly foliage was already beginning to thin, and, before long, their meeting-place would be exposed. By the degree of his anxiety concerning this same exposure, he was gradually enabled to find the goal of this mental adventure, and he had to own that, though uncommon in character, it would probably have to be driven in the common direction, as soon as circumstance turned crusty.

Though he still refused as vigorously as the girl to call their intercourse an ordinary intrigue, it became plain to him that necessity would presently involve them both in the

methods of less platonic lovers.

Despoiled he would not be, with such a fund of question left to put to her, and he felt certain that tact and ingenuity would easily persuade her to follow him, even into conditions she now thought beneath discussion.

It would not be difficult to teach this credulous girl that beneath the ugly framework of every problem lies hid a vibrant heart, ignored by the uninitiated. Tendency after

tendency had she resigned to him, for the pleasure of watching him tear its delicate ingredients to ribbons, and now, with the winter closing on the land, and the door threatening to close upon their companionship, he was confident that there was no opposition left in her to withstand his coming proposition. If none should intervene she would accept it, as she had, with more or less avidity, accepted his various opinions. She had winced, but only in the fashion of a highly-strung personality, quick to detect any momentous movement however slight. Her eye had flown, but always to return tamer, more curious, more confiding. She had accepted his letter of appointment. She had answered it, and with something warmer than acquiescence. She was coming back to him now, as fast as steam could bring her, leaving her husband behind. The husband should always be behind, farther and farther behind, he vowed. She had promised to set the window of her little boudoir, on the ground floor, open to the nightand to him.

That first chat, in the intimacy of fire and lamplight, should spell his "Waterloo." His faculties he believed to be mature—they should express their value in his battle with what might remain of her antagonism. He would use no weapon but his cautious tongue, nothing but the light shot he had always employed. But he now thought to know the vital parts in her mental construction; he fancied he knew where to hit. He would condense such education as he had gathered from the brains of the dead and the living, and what faith he still possessed in the virtue of existence should stand or fall by her acceptance or refusal of his offer.

She was the first to yield him any consistent dose of stimulation—of joie de vivre; she should be the last, he assured himself, with an ugly twist of the mouth, to flout his claim to such.

CHAPTER XXII

A PORTRAIT OF ALVA, LADY SOUTHERN, BY AN UNKNOWN ARTIST

Dora had been allowed an afternoon off, and Minnie was in attendance, when the mistress of The Court re-

turned from her short journey to town.

The old woman had laid out a white dress of rather severe cut, but it was ordered back to the wardrobe, and a tea-gown of dark blue silk chosen to replace it. Minnie looked distrustfully at the garment. The pattern wrought round the hem and about the square cut neck was intricate and beautiful, but the threads of gold wire were just a trifle more subdued in tint than the threads of Alva's hair. The silk shimmered and rustled with every movement of the wearer, but this little mystery of sight and sound seemed always an attribute to the central mystery, emanating from the lovely languorous woman, who dominated the occasion with such a regal air of placidity. Alva was far too absorbed in thought to note the furtive glances thrown at her, from time to time, by her attendant. With a careless smile of thanks for service, she left her, and made her way to the dining-room. When the long procession of dishes had been brought up and carried down again, almost untasted, when a cup of black coffee had been disposed of, she found herself the rare prey to a fit of restlessness, to a sudden need of human companionship.

The thought of Calder drew her from her warm seat out into the passage, from whence she made her way, by

candle-light, to the library.

"Calder," she said softly from the doorway, and the gray head turned.

"I was thinking of you," he replied unexpectedly, "wanting you. Come nearer."

She closed the door behind, and obeyed the imperious

tone.

"I'm not so tiresome as you once supposed, then?"

He made no reply to this evident call for flattery, and pointed to the chair opposite his own. When she seated herself, the light from his lamp fell full on her face, and with something like eagerness he leaned forward to scrutinize it.

"As a woman, you're not in the least interesting or valuable," he said calmly, "but, as an instrument, I begin to see significance in you. There's an extraordinary vacuum, and I'm curious to discover what force in nature will take advantage of it."

"A vacuum!" she echoed, with indignation; "that's not a very pretty way of expressing what distinguishes me from

the majority."

"The value of a vacuum is enormous; it's revolutionary. You're revolutionary. You're actually shaking my atheism. It's possible—it's just possible, that I'm wrong in my theory of human decadence. Your quiver of emotion doesn't appear to be reflex. But you're nervous; that won't do."

He laid a couple of emaciated fingers on her pulse.

"That's why I came to you, Mr. Calder. I want to be steadied. I'm going to make a journey to-night, but I can't see an inch of the way. Couldn't you show it me? You seem to look very far ahead."

"You must go the way of least resistance," he said,

after deliberation.

"You're sure, Calder—you're quite sure!"

"The fanatics wear out," he said, a light rising to his small, keen eyes; "the martyrs burn. Only by relaxing the personal grip can you hope to provide a breeding-ground for fresh vitality. But you mustn't resist. You mustn't tremble in the common way. You reduce the power. You must be perfectly passive."

"But where am I going?"

"Think," he said, peremptorily; "think, and the way will become visible. You have had fore-visions of it al-

ready."

"Yes," she said faintly. "I've seen a ribbon of light, going out, up into the infinite. But nothing is clear on either side of it; it cuts the darkness, and I'm beginning

to get frightened of the darkness."

"You're only frightened," he insisted, "because the moment of departure has come. You're trying to give your intelligence elbow-room, and habit is hampering the effort. You're shaking, as the soldier shakes the night before an engagement. It doesn't mean he'll run away at the critical hour; it means, more probably, that the generation of force

in his veins is making him uncomfortable."

"It's true, Calder; the force is coming, and it will carry me through; but oh! it's the strangest country! There are none of the old landmarks-right and wrong don't exist any more; the question changes to the exercise or nonexercise of faculty. See-I'm not trembling now. For years I've been preparing for this decision—this cutting of cables. I'm going out-away with my friend; but, Calder, where do they take us, these friends of the soul? How far?"

"I can't tell you what you find in front," he said slowly; "I can only tell you what you leave behind. But there's no need to tell; you've only to look at me, at the rest of us, with our gaunt looks and lax limbs. It's plain we're going nowhere save into our six foot of earth. At least there's nothing to risk, child. Go with one friend, come back with another. Move, at least, out of this circle of stagnant feeling. Move, while there's time and opportunity."

"Why have you never tried?" she asked.

"I? There's no vacuum in me. Every corner has been filled up. From my childhood I've gorged data-statistics —the history of human passions and desires. I've been too heavy to fly from the beginning. And, once, before, a winged creature sat as you are doing, and looked across at me. She had hair like yours, and eyes with the memory of freedom in them. She hurt me, reminding me of my self-imposed burden of the flesh. She came once, twice, and again, and each time there was fresh knowledge in her look. She, too, spoke of a friend and of a journey into the darkness, but she never came back to tell me of it. She never came back."

His fingers fell from her wrist, and the enthusiasm faded from his withered face. His head fell on his breast, and he seemed suddenly enveloped in mournful reminiscence.

Alva touched him, spoke to him, but in vain. With the memory of that first inspiration he lost, apparently, his thread of connection with the other. In a few minutes Anthony would be due, and, reluctantly—for the old man had roused her wonder—she left her seat and the room, and made her way to the boudoir.

She set the window open, put the lamp with the red shade on a table, so that the light should fall invitingly into the gloom of the garden, and knelt down before the fire

of pine-logs.

Calder had, at all events, set her vanity in a glow. She thought, complacently and coolly, of her own rarity of tissue, of the finger of fate singling her out and leading her, by the vulgar high-road of matrimony, to this central point of sensation, where stood awaiting her the sole creature in the universe she could companion without any sort of inward rebellion. It was odd that the thrill, engendered by so triumphant a train of thoughts, should end in a shiver. The air from the garden was damp and cold, and she turned her face from it and sent foraging eyes round the comfortable room. It was no state chamber, but it could draw, for all that, the line that separates middle-class ease from upper-class elegance. It was the toy, not the stamp, of a grande dame, and, for a painful second, Alva felt the results of her grandmother's education actually tampering with the sublime emotions of what she termed her "higher self." She saw the back of fortune turned, to leave her bare to the common sun and moon of normal conditions.

She had, as yet, reached no point of definite intention or expectation, even when under the influence of the librarian's stimulus; but now, she felt that the grand and vague issue of the night inclosed lesser and coarser ones. She had little time to yield to this new and disturbing impression, for Anthony appeared in the frame of the window, and, with an impulsive movement, as uncommon as it was graceful, she held out her hands towards him.

"I'm all alone, Tony, horribly alone. Why didn't you

come five minutes sooner?"

He smiled at her, but he made no effort to touch the proffered hands, and she let them fall again.

"It's warm here, in all conscience," he said, taking a

seat on the sofa, drawn invitingly up before the fire.

She kept her place upon the rug, and her face was on the same level as his own. The firelight played across it, filling it with rosy color.

"You've come fast," she reminded him, "and out of a

damp November night."

He set his hot fingers to her cheek, and saw her shrink. Laughing, he removed them, and leant back, thus widening

the distance between their two faces.

He had given his hand before, but never in the fashion of the sentimentalist, for it was upon restraint, he believed, that he had founded his influence. Griselda had taught him to be chary of yielding to the common habits, and, in Alva's case, he was aware that her chief quarrel with her husband concerned the question of elbow-room for doubt and speculation.

He had approached her cheek, too, more than once, but it had always pleased him to let suggestion do duty for fulfilment, and, watching her now, he was convinced of the wisdom of his tactics, convinced that she held in her nature

no power to combat his coming proposition.

Sitting together in the subdued light, they talked, for a time, in desultory fashion, but through each careless question or simple answer there ran a cord that seemed now to restrain the flight of an unspoken fancy, running alongside the quiet stream of talk, and now to urge it into excess. And all the time, the cord was being woven into a pattern, both mysterious and extenuating, a web, concealing more and more effectually the sense of wrong-doing. When the clock upon the mantelpiece struck an hour, Anthony looked at its unconscious face, and then back to the conscious one before him.

"I am going to Paris," he said, and brought an "Oh!" of consternation to her lips.

"With you, of course."

"With me?" she echoed, and her breath began to flutter.

"How quick you are; and how free from the common expletives!"

"And after Paris, Tony?"

She certainly had her voice under control.

"Why, Italy, of course."

"And after Italy?"

"Would the deluge frighten or enchant you, Alva?"

"Oh, the whole thing sounds like enchantment, but—tell me—does one ever come back from these magic excursions?"

"Not by the same route as one goes out; but that would be monotonous, wouldn't it?"

"Should we come back to England?" she persisted, "to this house?"

"Does a country or a house really mean anything to your imagination?"

"Not just now, perhaps, but I believe it might, at some

time or other."

"In plain translation: my game is not worth Lady Southern's candle."

"So many have played the game, Anthony."

"Oh, that's the rub, is it? But they don't play it our way."

"If you could prove that," she said, with sudden pas-

sion.

"May I smoke in this room?"

And, at a nod, he left his place and took a match-box

from the table in the window. While he stood away from her, lighting his cigarette, she turned again to the fire, holding out chill hands to the blaze, thinking-thinkingwith such intensity that she defeated her own purpose; for the thoughts were like Calder's—too heavy with knowledge and recollection to fly. She felt herself paralyzed by the horrible idea that fate and her own temperament had evolved for her this dangerous hour, and however she might struggle to make a decision for herself, the issue was fore-written.

When her companion returned to his seat on the sofa, she came to stand before him. For what seemed a long time nobody spoke. He blew rings of blue smoke into the air, and together they watched them, he with satisfaction, she with superstitious terror.

"If you think," she said at last, "that it means no more than that—no more than smoke, forming into a shape and losing that shape, why exert yourself? Why tempt me,

if-if there's nothing to take?"

"Why be tempted, Alva, if you're so sure on that

point?"

"But I'm not sure, and you know it. It's on my uncertainty that you trade. On my dim hope that there are more things in heaven and earth than-than-"

"Than Southern and his goods and chattels," he finished

lightly for her.

"If you're to get your way, Tony, you must make that way clearer," she said, with unexpected opposition.

He threw the cigarette into the fire and looked up at

her.

"We'll start with the prose. There's this house, Alva. You've found it-perhaps I had better say you still find ita desirable plaything. Well, I'm not inclined to quarrel with you on that account, seeing that I played in it myself for many years, as I once confessed to you. But one outgrows even a complicated toy, and you're bound to outgrow this one, if you haven't done so already. You'll want something bigger before long. You'll want a setting, in fact,

rather than a house, and that's what I'm prepared to give you."

"You might put more gilding into a new frame," she answered cautiously, "but you couldn't put just the same ghosts."

"The ghosts of respectable landowners—no—you're right, I couldn't; but I doubt if you'd want me to, when

you'd thought the matter out a bit."

He paused, a natural indolence in him warring with the conviction that if he were to conquer this vacillating spirit, he would have to exert himself.

"There are ghosts in my father's house, scores of them. They come back to the chimneys where they used to hide as priests or kings or spies; they groan in the attics and drive an army of maids through the house every year. They're stationary ghosts-even inattention won't persuade them to move on; and they're amusing and instructive; but they're not half so amusing or so instructive, to my mind, as the other sort, the sort we've garnered from the ends of the earth. My father is a collector of curios, you know. There are romances in marble and tragedies in bronze; there are bright moods in silver and grim moods in glass—in short, it's a museum of feeling for an emotionalist. Now, don't suppose I'm going to take you there. No, I want to take you to the far corners out of which these samples were dug. There's a sense in both of us, I fancy, which won't be put off with the mere attributes of mysticism. We shall scent and we shall take what ignorance or prejudice (national or personal), what limited means, in fact, have prevented the centuries from disturbing."

Her face burned and paled again.

"But you haven't unlimited means," she said, with one of those lapses into prose with which she had occasionally

surprised him before.

"You mean, I'm dependent on my father. But there is a race, my dear Alva, who spend their lives and their capital in tempering the wind of delay to such lambs as myself, suffering from temporary—only temporary, mind

you—paucity of fleece. I can assure you that the question of freedom, so far as it is concerned with pounds, shillings,

and pence, has been satisfactorily settled."

She turned from him once more, and leaned her arms upon the mantelpiece, leaving him free to smile at the memory of his own ingenuity. There was more than a Jewish banker at his back; there was the rancor of a vindictive man. To hurt Gwendolen through her own son, and through those old friends of hers, round whom suspicion had always hovered, was a temptation the old ruffian had been powerless to resist. Taken to some extent into his son's confidence, he had disgorged money with remarkable liberality. He had sped the youth upon a path his diseased mind could pursue with little logic but with an abundance of malice. He could grasp the opening to wound—to avenge. And Anthony chuckled to himself, as he mused on the subtlety of his own scheme and its complete success. There was an added attraction to him in the thought that this beautiful and only half explored woman would come to him with a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. It was positively exhilarating to horoscope the fury of the despoiled grandmother, when she realized that not only the girl, but this portion of her fortune was lost to her.

The clock striking again warned him that time and opportunity should not be trifled with, and that it would be wise to nail his victim to a definite promise, which, he felt sure, once given, would be considered sacred by her

romantic obstinacy of mind.

"Must I tell you more, Alva? Doesn't your own imagination indorse what I've suggested? Do the house and the husband really represent an obstacle?"

She turned round, and there was more resolution in her

aspect than he quite liked.

"I can't do things as glibly as you, Tony. If you care, you'll fight for your point and me. I won't come for a raised finger and one of your enigmatical smiles. You must substantiate some of the hints, anyway. You must prove that you'll give me more than convention has given.

What, precisely, am I going to gain and to lose by following you?"

If he felt annoyance at this further call upon his mental

ingenuity, he successfully hid all traces of it.

"That's sound enough," he said approvingly. "Come and sit here, beside me. I'm not going to finger you or look at you either—in fact, I want you out of the light—out of my line of view while I talk."

She took the place he indicated, and leant back, watching

his averted profile.

"I'm to tell you what you lose? Upon my soul, it's impossible to build the castle with anything but cards. It shall go up, as you insist, though you're bound to pull it down yourself directly. Marriage! It has its day, of course, like every dog, and I won't say it isn't a festive day. Flowers, music, frocks, excitement, envy, and thenthe journey into dual solitude, with the still, small voice breaking through the rattle of the railway train. What did it say? You've not forgotten. You tried to silence it as one silences a too intelligent child, betraying the false basis of an adult boast. You sighed—now don't deny it for your grandmother's strident tones, for the chatter of your bridesmaids, for the voices of dressmakers and jewelers, for anything and everything calculated to drown the note of disappointment. Southern is a handsome fellow; his taste is irreproachable; he was a triumph of the tailor's art on his wedding-day. He's a good fellow; he took care you shouldn't have a material want unfulfilled; he surrounded you with picture papers, and oh, how glad you were to retire into them!"

He allowed her time to contradict, but she did not take advantage of it. He could hear her breath coming more quickly than was natural, certainly to her, and he went

on, with an increase of enthusiasm.

"We'll allow marriage to be a species of fortress. It keeps out the storm—keeps off those great breaths of wild air that come across the mountains, and, according to a man of genius, drive the susceptible mad. One certainly

remains perfectly sane within one's four walls. Routine, unbroken routine, is the order of the day. The lord rules and the lady submits, year in, year out. The law of self-deprivation flourishes, and the law of material increase breeds its noisy band of robbers, destined to succumb in their turn to voluntary bondage. Oh, it's impossible to pile up such cheap and such utterly unnecessary agony! Personally, I'm convinced that law was meant to be an alphabet. The letters in their natural order spell nonsense; it's our reason that's to cock and turn them, to get them into a shape that's usable. Honor is an essentially mundane article, invented for our comfort and happiness. Is it honorable to remain beside a man from whom you've been divorced by every natural emotion in your breast? Can you give him or take from him anything of value, as we regard values? You've never been allowed to indulge candor in your life, and, in consequence, you've known no actual life. With me you can express yourself; with Southern it's all suppression, and suppression ends in annihilation; nature takes away what we refuse to employ. There's the house left; there's the possibility of children in it, but you're not the sort of woman who finds her heaven in training the young idea how to shoot. You're too adventurous-too conscious, besides, of the three-score-andten limit; you'd rebel at the pace, and you'd be apt to shake in Southern's children the distrust of progression that your grandmother's teaching has forbidden you to shake in him. No, Alva, there's no way for you but mine."

He turned to find her trembling.

"To be held, dear, by so worn a chain."

He spoke with tender mockery, and the note was rare as it was musical.

"If I snap it, Tony, where will you take me?"

"Wherever you've courage to come," he declared wantonly. And in the silence, while her resolution fluttered, like a bird before the open door of its cage, his mind was composed enough to find in this picture of irresolution a subject for the painter.

234 A Portrait of Alva, Lady Southern

He saw her, pinafored, before a nursery fire, the room behind her dark, her hair upstanding, her great ignorant eyes fixed fearfully upon the ruined castle in the flames. She was the child-mother of all women, and she waited for the impetus that, wedded to the plastic mood of the moment, should inspire or fail her; should drive her into illuminative life, or leave her to drop back into the circle of nursery law and limit.

He was content to wait, certain that presently she would

speak and speak committally.

"Yes. I want to look out into great cities, not into a gentleman's park. I'm in love with life but not with you, as you're in love, not with me, but with all the possibilities in women that granny and her kind have drowned, like kittens in a pond. I want emancipation, but-but can you give it me? That's the question. One minute I think so and I'm ready to follow you, and then I'm caught by an old memory. I'm a child, Tony, looking right and left for the door of escape, and now and again I find it, and I get away into the forest. It's a very diminutive wood, to be exact, but it's big enough to hold a band of fairy playfellows. You've only got to shut your eyes and smile ever so faintly and put out your two arms, with all the fingers outspread, and long and long for all the things they've told you don't exist, and presently you hear the laughter, the voices, like little silver bells, coming nearer. You feel a touch—a pinch, if they're mischievous, and you open your eyes to find them round you in a circle, and for a minute, for an hour, a year (oh, there's no way to mark the flight of time, save by the degree of crossness on the faces when you get home!), you're living, loving, going somewhere, feeling something. It's glorious! but it isn't all, or the memory would be sweet. There's the night to come. light goes out, and the fairies of the wood are back. it isn't fun and frolic they are bringing; it's anger. They're not pretty or kind any more; they're treacherous, and they've the power to strangle me, by virtue of the ring I drew with them in the forest. I'm dying to the thought

that I gave myself to murder in that green wood in that moment of ecstasy. I made some strange-some fatal mistake, Tony, and that's the thought that keeps me from you, that makes me hesitate; for when I stretched my arms out to you to-night, as you appeared at the window, it was in just the same way, with the same inward cry, with the same smile on my mouth, with the same longing to escape the grim, grave People Downstairs. Suppose I'm about to make another great mistake, about to give myself again to treachery and this memory coming to disturb my dreams is a warning?"

"Undoubtedly it is a warning, but not against me. The mistake you made was big enough and treacherous enough to rouse the fury of any champion of your higher self, fairy or otherwise—the mistake of that prosaic marriage of yours; that marriage without love or even interest; that marriage that filled a column of The Morning Post. I should be inclined to strangle you if you took my ring and

went back to Mayfair."

She let herself be calmed by his incisive tone. The awe

lingered upon her face, but the opposition faded out.

"Yes, it's true," she agreed presently; "I married the enemy of my forest-lovers, but it wasn't my fault. I wanted to be left alone; I didn't want a husband, butthey wouldn't give me the new life without him, and I had waited a long time. And there was his great name and his fine house—and the pressure. They all seemed to care so much, granny and Peter and even little silly Griselda. I took him partly to please them; and—he's kind, and there are moments when he and this house of his take a rough hold of me. They seem to threaten me, like my fairies, with passion, with death—but they haven't a right, have they? They're only matter, and our relation is of the mind. Don't look at me with that curl of the lip; I'm doing what you want-I'm coming, but-where-Tonywhere?"

"Seaward," he ventured, watching her cautiously, as the librarian had done half an hour before; "in a great ship,

236 A Portrait of Alva, Lady Southern

Alva, with giant sails that opportunity has never filled before. First we'll go south, to let you feel the sun and hear the swallows—to get this November fog out of our lungs; then north, I think, through solitude and ice, to test the quality of our mental revenues, the strength of our bond of sympathy. We'll listen to the howl of wolves, and go near—as near as life may go—to the outside edge. We'll draw it fine, dear, our line of adventure. And when we've proved the question of endurance we'll go west, and, following the law of contrasts, shoot and ride and hustle with the fidgets of the earth; then east, to poke into the caves where barbarism shows its fangs—where pioneers of a doomed cause enjoy, in secret, the practice of occultism, wage their ineffectual but vastly entertaining war upon what is generally called the Reformation."

"And then?—and then? There are only four corners,

and they are all gone."

"Then, you distrustful creature, back to some central point of civilization—Paris, maybe, or our own capital—to crush experience into a cup and test its quality; to offer the wine to a neighbor, to intoxicate or poison his unseasoned head; to speculate, to recall, to argue, to return, even, if the spirit prompts, to some too bewildering spot to look with a shrewder or a bolder eye into its mystery. Tomorrow you shall be left alone. You shall go over this house, like a careful housewife, scheduling all the objects it contains, and their respective values. Against the sum of them you shall weigh my offer, and you shall make your decision without so much as a finger on your freedom of mind. I tell you I want no martyr—no Lot's wife; I want a friend of my own pattern or nothing, when I start for Paris to-morrow night."

"I'll come, Tony; but not in the night-time. He's been good to me, and I don't want anybody to tell him but myself. I must wait till he comes back to-morrow, and I don't yet know at what hour it will be. Yes, he's been good to me. I wish he hadn't; I wish he wasn't—

wasn't---"

She was at a loss for a finish, and he supplied it easily.

"Wasn't the man you were bound to say 'good-by' to sooner or later. Of course you do; nobody wants to make a mess of marriage. But you're right not to make a midnight or hasty flitting. We are going to express, not to efface, ourselves, and the more openly we go the better. You'll write to me to-morrow, naming an hour and spot. You're not afraid any more, are you?"

He left his seat, and stood looking down on her, weighing the advisability of adding anything to his argument. Her raised face seemed to demand a last inciting phrase, and, inwardly protesting at the extravagance of women, he found

and voiced one.

"You think I ask too much; but wait a year, only a year. I'll help you paint a picture, before which those whisperers in your Gallery shall grow pale with envy. You shall go down to posterity the woman I've discovered, not the meek complement of a country squire; we'll write your history on a page of glowing life, not on a yard or two of canvas."

And with the promise, with a mere brush of his lips against the hand impulsively extended, he was gone, leaving her, as he well knew, half the slave of his profane eloquence and half the victim of that ancient fever in her blood, that had, from childhood, obscured for her the face of

reason.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE VIRTUE OF THE MOUSE

It never occurred to Alva to suspect an undue interest in her movements in the persons who catered to her physical She would have been both astonished and chagrined had she known how often her habits, her actions, and her conversation were the topic for discussion "belowstairs." Much of such discussion had to be uttered out of earshot of the greater lights of the servants' hall; but it was known to every inmate of The Court, save its master, that her early morning walks were not always solitary. Her companion was not difficult to name, and though the foliage by the river concealed, more often than not, the movements of the pair, there were odd occasions when the meeting was noted and duly commented upon. What an under-keeper whispered in the ear of an under-housemaid might not be any very damaging tale, still, that such a whisper should pass at all, was torture to one faithful soul in the house.

Minnie, by virtue of her long connection with the family, was privileged to see more of her mistress' state of mind than falls to the usual lot of a servant, and she had little difficulty in piecing together the fragments dropped or thrown to her. She had been perfectly aware at what hour her charge began those summer days, though she was never summoned to help her dress. Some pressure of anxiety would sound as regularly as an alarum clock, and she would rise and dress and slip, like a mouse, in the footsteps of her darling, to note, with cautious intensity, every movement of a huntress singularly ignorant, at first, of the quarry she sought.

But Minnie knew the particular demand behind this girl's nature. She knew—none better—the origin of this book of

life so mysterious to others. She had seen the growing form of disunion between husband and wife; she had marked the moment when the first whisper of satiety had subdued the light in the eye of the solitary; and with the advent of Anthony Glover on the scene, every faculty in the servile but intelligent mind had risen to battle with the danger he represented. If, in aspect, she resembled a mouse, in dogged pursuit of the trail she resembled a bloodhound; and no single interview between Alva and her new friend passed without the old woman's cognizance; or, indeed, without her presence or near proximity. From many a green hiding-place she participated in the knowledge or conjectures they exchanged so liberally; and day by day she watched for the waning of the summer, that promised to arrest this strange companionship: for beneath all her terror Minnie did not fail to note something other than the common form of mutual attraction. She recognized a mental, rather than a physical, indiscretion in the affair, but she was experienced enough to know that intrigue has taken this circumlocutionary route to disaster upon occasion, and she did not relax an iota of her vigilance.

And the approach of winter had brought dismay, for in Alva's aspect it had been impossible to misread the denial of all question of separation. The leaves, that year, had been slow to forsake their trees, and until late in October the two had continued to meet. Then came a brief interruption, for Sir Peter took his wife to Paris for a fortnight. She went cheerfully enough, but, alas! she came back more cheerfully still. And though the early morning walk had been given up, it was apparent to the watcher that the post brought daily communion with the tempter; and Alva's air of dreamy absorption was directed no longer to the pictures in the Gallery, but to those closely-covered sheets of note-

paper.

In November she took the short journey to town with Peter, returning alone the same day, and Minnie guessed that opportunity was too close to be resisted.

From a vantage-point above the boudoir window she

watched for the corroboration of her inward vaunt of perspicuity. A sensation of despair seized her as she looked down upon the patch of rosy light thrown invitingly by the red lamp in the room below. It spoke as forcibly to her as to the young man climbing up so steadily towards invasion; for, if he had bold intentions in his veins, she had tragic memory in hers. When the footsteps paused, and the low sound of voices came up, instead, to her ear, she slipped from her hiding-place and away to another, chosen beforehand in anticipation of this same emergency.

Alva little guessed that at every meeting she had supposed clandestine, her old nurse had been present, or at least near, and that, on this momentous night of her fortunes, she knelt within a dozen yards of the sofa by the fireside, behind a door, inconsidered because not in use, but, as Minnie took care to guarantee, perfectly usable. And before many minutes had passed, the eavesdropper knew that her philosophy had not been at fault. With a thumping heart she told herself that the time for noting and recording was over and gone, and the time for action was come. She was something of a fatalist; for in this bitter and exacting hour she believed implicitly that her share in the fortunes of this dear but unstable family had been prearranged; and that the claim now made upon her gentle nature was as irrestible a force as that from which Alva's being and its needs had been evolved.

Through long hours of that night she wrestled with her problem, and it was not till the dawn was streaking her chamber with gray light that she succeeded in getting resolution into a straight line. For she saw a double wound to be healed. She longed, not only to dismiss one man, but to reinstate another, and upon the foothold that nothing but his own lack of assertiveness—so she believed—had caused him to miss. In this woman there lurked behind fear, and fatalism too, the divine power to pierce a way through layers of outer shell to the genial root of nature. She believed, in the face of certain discouraging facts, that Alva was as noble a creature as her outward shape implied; and

she insisted that the touch of a certain wand-oddly constructed of prose and magic-would cause the beautiful blind eyes to open, were it but fingered with discretion.

The morning brought a wire from the master of the house, delaying his return till the evening of that day, and to the two interested in his movements this slight change

of plan caused unmistakable relief.

To Alva it conveyed the reassuring thought that her tale could be told in a dim light, and that separation would follow swiftly upon it; while Minnie's story belonged yet more

insistently to the dusk and the night.

The coachman had stared when she made her strange request for a seat in the carriage he was taking to meet his master, but his amazement, not quite free from a taint of impertinence, left her indifferent; she regarded it as we regard the everyday objects in a room in which we are about to submit to a serious operation.

Established, eventually, in a corner of the brougham, she drew her cloak closely about her, and under the cloak she held to her breast a tiny leather case. So acute was her consciousness of its contents that it seemed to her a flame burned inside the innocent strip of leather; a flame, in which all the happy and careless sensations of the past twenty years were to be consumed. Resolutely she shook off this numbing condition of mind, and urged into review her train of intentions. She longed for her lost youthfor the courage that she feared years of inaction must have bled from her; for, in the struggle ahead, she knew that she would need infinite resource and self-control, if she were to save both those beloved points—the honor of a woman, the faith of a man.

There was no moon, only scurrying clouds, dimly to be distinguished from the black sky behind them; the wind rose in gusts, only to fall again, like a force conscious of its own efficacy; the few remaining leaves upon the trees that lined the way, rattled at intervals down on to the roof of the carriage with a mournful sound. Nowhere was there stimulation. Out of her ancient frame must she evolve it, and, like some brave animal at bay against fearful odds, she compelled all the powers, natural and cultivated, in her being into desperate movement.

These were truths which she hugged so tightly to her breast-truths on which lives had been wrecked and founded. But the man she went to face must see deeper than the eye of common calculation. He must look below surface shame and surface pride. He must not stop and shudder at the shipwreck; he must go further, deeper. He must see the deathless spirit of hope in the great element, over which successful achievement rides, and into which unsuccessful achievement is temporally submerged; he must see reincarnation, not annihilation; he must see immaturity, not corruption. She had no such phrases at command, but she had, in her heart, the germ of understanding they endeavor—sometimes so inadequately—to describe. She was strong in her honesty, in her untainted devotion to others, and, as she neared the station, she felt some of the confidence she prayed for, flowing, like a river of life, into her feeble veins.

She hoped devoutly that the young baronet's kind heart would not induce him to offer any one a lift, and she listened anxiously to the steps approaching the carriage.

There were four of them, but the two shuffling ones belonged to the porter carrying the bag, and, with a gasp of relief, Minnie found herself, a minute later, alone with the returned traveler.

"It's only me, Sir Peter," she said, as he stepped in and took the seat opposite her. "I'd something to say, and I took this opportunity."

"Something to say? Nothing unpleasant, I hope."

For a moment she made no reply; she was gathering her faculties together; and he leaned forward to get a clearer view of her face under the lamp they were about to pass.

"It's not bad news, is it, Minnie?"

"It's bad, Sir Peter, as you first look at it, but—there's good behind, I think."

He contrived to check an ejaculation of impatience, and

she spoke again quickly and soothingly.

"Listen quietly, Sir Peter, for it's no easy tale to tell, and I'm no good at putting things fancy fashion, though Miss Alva used to say I was. She says she's going to leave you."

Again he checked the impulse towards expression.

"It isn't my place, Sir Peter, to tell you that she doesn't know what she's saying or doing. She's mad with her fairy fancies, which she says I taught her years ago—God forgive me!—though I never thought to do more than amuse a child that wasn't too happy. Anyway, when Mr. Anthony Glover says 'yes' she don't seem to have the will to say 'no.' But there's some one that can say it for her—some one stronger than you and me, though he's in his grave."

"Anthony Glover!" her hearer echoed, in a bewilder-

ment so great as almost to drown his consternation.

"He's never been to the house, Sir Peter, not till to-night. He's been walking by the river, below the garden, in the early mornings, and she's met him. It was fate that sent her there, as it's fate that kept these letters from the fire."

Mechanically he took the case she held out. Vaguely he looked down at it, and slowly the passion of outraged pride and affection crept across his pleasant features, transforming them almost out of recognition.

"She's been meeting Glover by the river. For how long,

Minnie?"

"Oh, you're not going to understand!" said the old woman wildly; and she put out two shaking hands towards

the little leather pocket-book that he held.

"Listen to me, Sir Peter. Listen, I tell you! Don't listen to your own thoughts—not yet at least, not till you've read the story here. I couldn't make up my mind for long whether I ought to give them to you or to her. And I give them to you, because I think—I hope—you're different to most: stronger, kinder, juster. And if I give them to her, it seems to shut you out, Sir Peter; and there's a way into

her heart, though you didn't come on it at once. But it's a cruel way. It isn't for me to ask you to be gentle, for you were always gentle from a boy. But don't put the name first; there's more than name goes to the making of human souls, and there's more in hers than those cold Danes and Fawcetts could give. There's the fierce heart of folks the Lord Almighty let rule a long time—some in big houses like yours, and some in playhouses—and such don't learn easy as their way isn't the only way. You've put her first for a long time; put her first just a bit longer—till you've read the letters, anyway. Oh, the times I've tried to burn them—and—the times he tried! He told me when he lay dying. He had the case about his neck, and the doctor helped him put it into my hand. Doctors know a deal about us and our weakness, and they don't tell tales neither. That young man didn't tell. He talked of delirium to the poor scared woman that called herself his wife. She didn't want it called anything else; all she wanted was to get away from that bed of horror and the poor maimed creature on it. It was to me he whispered at the last. He told me to put them in the fire as he'd tried to do. But it wasn't a bit of use; they wouldn't burn—it was like trying to burn her;—and I had to put them back in the case, and I put the case about my neck and kept it there from that day to this, and—now—I know why, Sir Peter. Those letters weren't meant to be burnt; they hadn't done their work. You'll read them to-night, and you'll understand why you can't be hard on Miss Alva, why you can't think of pride -why, it isn't all bad news I'm bringing you. For if she reads the story in the right way, it's you she'll cling to in her terror. It's the story of one who crucified the flesh. She must read the letters, and I'd like to have her read them in the little play-room. There's something beside dust and spiders in it, as she's guessed already. There's the spirits of dead children, and they'll make the letters plain. They'll touch her with their tiny fingers, as they've touched me times and oft, when I've slipped up in the gloaming. I'll set a bit fire there to-night, and you must coax her up." She stopped, looking pleadingly into his face, with its lowered eyelids and twitching features.

"Glover," he said between his teeth; but she broke out

again into eager defense.

"He doesn't matter; he can't matter, after to-night. It's her that matters; it's her we've got to save. When you read you mustn't think of Glover, as she won't any more. You must think of the times she wanted to talk to you and you wouldn't let her. There were such times, Sir Peter, times when she was lonely and frightened, when she knew that her place in your great house wasn't just what folks thought; times when the painted men and women tried to tell her of the bond. You'll think of that, Sir Peter, and not of the man that doesn't signify."

Touched by the eloquence of one whose devotion he had always fancied to be of the mute species—touched, too, by some of the impressions and recollections she called up, he forced himself to accept, in part, this vast demand upon

his natural temper.

"She's here still?" he said; and Minnie nodded.

"She'll always be here, Sir Peter, and it's for you to let her be happy here. I can't tell you any more, but the letters will make it clear."

In silence they accomplished the remainder of the drive, and as the carriage drew up before the lighted portico, he leaned forward, touching his companion on the arm.

"It was kind to come and tell me, Minnie. It's easier to take from you. You're the true friend of my house; that much is clear, though everything else is still damned chaos."

She had no word for this cordial if blunt recognition of service. It seemed of such utter inconsequence what he felt for her. What was he going to feel towards his wife?

She watched him climb the steps and pass through the lighted hall; then the carriage was driven round to the back, and she slipped out and up to her own room, to remove her hat and cloak. Then, with scarcely five minutes' delay, she went to her mistress, to find her far too

deeply wrapped in meditation to blame this tardy appearance, or even to note those few stolen minutes in the playroom, where she lit a fire and reversed the old rocking-chair that had stood on its head in a corner for more years than Minnie could calculate.

And, meanwhile, Peter sat in his study, holding the leather case in his hand. He would not open it until the thought of Glover had been consigned, not to oblivion, but to the background of his mind. He had, tacitly, promised to bring as open a mind as possible to the consideration of these mysterious letters, and he hoped to be able to keep that promise.

When at length he drew them from their covering, there floated into the room an unmistakable scent of lavender, and, involuntarily, the artificial restraint under which he suffered relaxed a little. The vision of many women, moving, immature, and ignorant, quick with the desire to live, and tormented by the fetters of circumstance, down the long pathway of the centuries, came to soften the memory of a single false one. Less conscious of himself, less conscious of Alva, he began to read this story of long ago, so strangely connected with his own day, and, as he turned page after page of the thin, crackling notepaper, much of his normal air of serenity returned to him.

When he replaced the letters in the case his hand was steady, and the eyes he turned on to the fire were full of eager interest. For a full half-hour he sat, formulating, it was to be supposed, the plan of action demanded of him by the revelation of the night. It was plain that he saw in his hands the material out of which great occasions are made or marred, and that he had unearthed the will, if not the power, to preserve this particular one. His passion had disappeared, but an unusual degree of animation and resolve warmed his dark eyes, promising some variation of habit to the coming hour—the hour in which he was to battle with the delirious fancy of the stranger at his gate—the girl who stood so passively within the circle of physical touch, but who rode so treacherously into the spiritual

regions of his innate disdain. Perhaps he saw, what Minnie had suggested to him, a species of profanity in that disdain; a form of betrayal in that refusal to be drawn by her into the complexity of intercourse she found so stimulating. Perhaps this first recognition of a division of responsibility was soothing to his pride; at all events he left his study and made his way upstairs with the aspect of a man strung up to play the champion of a dear cause rather than the avenger of an unpardonable wrong.

When he entered the vast and melancholy bedroom, where so many of the Southern brides must have found disillusion, Minnie slipped from behind her mistress' chair, and replaced the ivory brush she had evidently been using upon the dressing-table. With one keen look at her master's face, a look that apparently satisfied her, she left the room, and Alva turned her fair head, with its two long plaits of hair, and looked gravely at her husband.

"I've something to say to you-" she began, and she

pointed to the chair drawn up beside her own.

"Suppose you let me speak first?" he broke in, his generous resolution fired into something like zeal by the air of irresponsibility emanating from her. She wore a white dressing-gown, with bands of fur about it, and the only touch of color about her was made by a pair of scarlet velvet slippers, in and out of which he could see her feet working in a nervous and unfamiliar fashion.

"Alva, we began wrong. We're going to start fresh."

But with a gesture that might mean fear or anger, she turned abruptly from the face he brought so near her own.

"It's too late, Peter; it's just twenty-four hours too late."

CHAPTER XXIV

PETER

Nonplused for the moment, he left it to her to break the silence that followed.

"You should have spoken sooner. I gave you chances enough; but no, you didn't approve my ideas. You were impatient with them, or, what was worse, you were patient. You drove me into myself; and now, because I've found satisfaction and promise there, you come to me and cheerfully suggest we should begin all over again. It's too late, I tell you."

"It's late, but not too late. I'll own up to the impatience, Alva, and to the patience; but are you really satisfied with—

with what you've found in yourself?"

She turned to look at him with some degree of astonishment.

"Oh!" he said quickly, "I'm not much good at the jargon, but that doesn't mean I'm void of all the subtler emotions."

"I see," she broke in on him hotly—all the more hotly because of an inward twinge of dismay; "it wasn't that you couldn't talk to me, it was that you wouldn't then."

"We'll be explicit to-night, Alva. What, exactly, have

I denied you?"

"Oh, nothing," she said bitterly, "that your world and its courts of jurisdiction would recognize. I've had every material comfort and attention, and yet—I'm starved. A hundred times I've put out feelers to find the individual points in you, and each time I've had to draw back again. You've clipped every tendency, you've fined down every virtue or vice, until your personality is nothing but a smooth shaven lawn, and you ask me to disport myself upon it.

Why, there's nothing to play with, nothing to work at, nothing to pick, nothing to tend, nothing to destroy. You've been by turns my preacher (a mute one) and my lapdog, and you only come to me now because some instinct has told you that I've found for myself a way of escape."

It was irresolution that wrought in her so fervid a passion of revolt. She had suffered the throes of indecision already, and she winced at the memory of the hot iron. It is terrible to fight for what one elects to call life, but it is even more terrible to feel an alien hand upon the life-buoy one has secured after an almost superhuman struggle.

"I'll own I've not been quite fair or quite kind," he said gently. "But I will not own that it's too late to make a new beginning. Come away from this house, Alva, for a time. I'm not sure, with you, that it hasn't an influence—to use no more supernatural term. I'm not sure that the ghost of my most practical mother doesn't haunt me here, as a different sort of phantom haunts you. Let's try another spot. Deane will manage all right for the winter."

"Paris—Italy—Egypt," she scoffed; "do you really suppose it will be a new story because we give it a new name? How long do you suppose it will take to grope our way through a little foreign glaze back to the heart of our old quarrel? I shall see nothing after a week or two but my own conscious face; feel nothing but my own tired body; hear nothing but my own bored mind crying, like the clown in the pantomime, 'Here we are again!'"

"And will Glover manage to silence the clown?" he in-

quired bluntly.

"Some one has told you, Peter?"
"Some one has told me, Alva!"

"Who? How? But what does it matter? What does anything matter except the motive power of our actions? I can't stay in this house where I'm no wife, where I've no one to speak to—where the loneliness has unnerved me. I used to like it; I used to welcome it so gladly; but now it's all repetition. Even the pictures are silent, scornful.

I stood for an hour in the Gallery to-day, and not a word was spoken. They're tired of me and I of them."

"And Glover will find you others?"

"He'll find me occupation," she retorted fiercely. "He gives me sensations, and he condescends to accept them again from me. We are always arguing, and yet we never quarrel. He is natural, and nature has a thousand aspects. Now he is a smiling, summer landscape, beckoning to siesta and lazy speculation; now he is a deep and a dark pool, neither inviting nor repelling my excursion into the mystery; now he is a rock on which one may beat one's head, and fear and suffer, without making any impression on his phlegm. He is neither aggressive nor subservient; he is neither slave nor master. Before my fancy he stands like one of those still-featured, smooth-tongued victims of the French Revolution, who could trifle and satirize in the anteroom of the guillotine. It's impossible to class them, impossible to plumb their self-control, but it's a liberal education to try."

All her old exuberance of imagination was back, and now she looked at him with lovely eyes of defiance, with her lips curled into that half-smile that spoke so eloquently

of emancipation.

"I don't see the impossibility of classing them," Peter answered slowly, hunting his line of argument with the ponderous gravity of an unpractised man. "What are they but the remnants of an aristocracy that failed to keep its place in the scheme of creation, spite of a deep root? Have you looked beneath the brocade and the ruffles? Did they ever utter anything sounder than an epigram, generally as profane as it was witty? And are you quite sure that their contempt for death was not merely the result of a lack of imagination? It's shared, remember, by the least civilized of nations; and to my mind, perhaps fairly, and perhaps unfairly, that attitude you find so impressive recalls, pretty forcibly, the 'I don't care' of the nursery rebel; I always said it myself, with a lost cause in front and an uncomfortable conscience behind."

Peter 251

He smiled sourly at the astonishment with which she was regarding him.

"You didn't expect me to understand these niceties of

argument, did you?"

"If you understand them, Peter, how do you dare to despise them?"

"They lead nowhere."

"And where do you suppose this first real talk of ours is

going to lead?" she asked satirically.

"It's going to lead you out of danger. Are you such a baby as not to realize the price this fellow asks for his—his damned story of eternal occupation? The pictures in my Gallery are of men and women who lived straight, kind lives; who didn't ask for more than their share of amusement. They tire you, do they? You mean to go and look at Glover's Gallery; it's long enough, considering his age and his opportunities, if scandal is to be believed. You'll find variety, I don't doubt; but, have you considered for a moment the way out, as well as the way in?"

"The way out, Peter? Do you dare to insinuate that this

is just an episode?"

"That's certainly all it can possibly be to him."

"You're jealous," she declared passionately, "of a power

that has passed you over."

"Well, put it so if you like. I'll try and leave Glover out as far as possible. You've talked of love, Alva, for this house of mine."

"I meant to love it, I did love it-until-until-"

"You're going to betray it," he interrupted coolly. "You've often spoken of the spirit of tradition in it, of the chain of ancestry, of a great name handed down, untarnished, from century to century. You've been angry with me because I didn't encourage your eloquence, because I objected to be regarded in the light of a link rather than a man, but in the end, it is you who want to snap the chain and tarnish the record, and for no better reason than that you've been forced to yawn."

Again she looked at him in wonder, and again he answered the look.

"You see, it's only a question of a little practice, and your youths of the First Empire practised nothing else, save perhaps sword-play. Give me a week, and I'll undertake to master all the verbal thrust and parry you find so exhilarating."

"I've told you it's too late, Peter. I've been tormented enough by uncertainty, and you never spoke. I've made up my mind at last, and I won't—I can't unmake it—because you're frightened into concession. I've given my

word."

"You gave it me first, Alva."

"No. Granny gave it to you. I wasn't awake then."

"You're not awake now. You're dreaming of a fantastic marriage of souls. I've a strong sense of wrong against you. I'm fighting it all the time I'm pleading with There's a natural beast in me that wants to turn away and tell you to go where you please, that actually wants to gloat over the knowledge that Glover would more than revenge that sense of wrong for me, but I daren't give way to it. I can't let you go, because you're not responsible. You haven't begun to think yet. You're a dream-lady playing at being real. When the dream gets too absurd, he won't be kind to you, because he hasn't learned to love the woman underneath as I have. Stay with me, Alva; I can't give you such a wealth of fancies to play with, but—I've found two or three to-night, and I'll find more. There's a book, indeed there is, in every heart, even in mine. There's a pool of dark thoughts (how dark, I didn't guess myself until to-night) where you can fish for unsuspected things, and a rock on which you can beat that dear head, to the point, at least, where pain begins, and I can't help thinking you'll find it far enough. Alva, you'll stay with me. You won't sell your folly to that beast, my name to that betrayer, yourself to misuse."

He tried to catch her hands, but she thrust him off.

"Leave me alone, Peter. If I'm only absurd, after all,

it ought to be easy enough. You may be a book of sorts, but I'm deep in another now. You may learn what you call my 'jargon,' but you'll never care for it. We shall never meet, except by making concessions. You'll go back to your old self once you fancy your honor safe, and I should have to go back to my solitude. It's no use patching and pretending; it's no use making great resolutions, only to go back on them. If you love me, if you care for my happiness, make my going easy. It's the last and it's the only kindness I'll take from you."

He knew that he was beaten, and by the strength of his own disappointment he could gauge the quality of his hope that the tale of the night need come no nearer to her than his own enlightenment brought it. He had counted, too confidently, it seemed, upon the secret virtue in his long silent tongue; the rare effort had astonished her, it had even disturbed her, but the spell against him was too strong. Look where he would, it was to see now no way of escape

for her, save the one Minnie had revealed.

The play-room, with its incongruously innocent aspect, must indeed play that anteroom to the guillotine of which she had babbled with such ridiculous appreciation. This still dear, but temporarily foolish, creature must be given to the wolves, for an hour at least. She was adult and she was criminal. She vowed—just a trifle too aggressively, perhaps, to convince—that she was not his in any sense worth the name, but, for all that, his heart contracted at the thought of her in the grip of this unexpected and terrible revelation, against the significance of which her childish egoism would, indeed, have to beat its head to the point of pain.

"When do you go?" he said abruptly.

"To-morrow, at mid-day."

"Then, for another twelve hours or so, you belong to me."

"I suppose so, in a way—but—surely your pride says 'hands off.'"

"No. It says something very different. I don't mean to

intrude myself upon you, but I want you to read these letters. You're to read them very carefully, and in the little play-room upstairs. Minnie has lit a fire there. It was Minnie who gave them to me, who told me of your intention."

She stared nervously at him.

"The play-room," she murmured vaguely and mechanically, as she submitted to his guiding hand and let herself be drawn from her seat towards the door behind the curtain. "Peter, I don't understand."

"You'll understand soon enough."

Alarming as this attitude was, it could not but appeal to her love of adventure. As she stumbled in his wake up the long flight of narrow steps, her heart was beating with as much excitement as fear, and when she reached the room above, she looked about her in a dazed but expectant fashion.

There was a lamp upon the dwarf chimneypiece, and for the first time she saw the cheery leap of flames in the dilapidated fireplace. The chair before it looked inviting, and she sank on to it readily at his instigation.

For an instant he remained, gazing down at her, his face white and preternaturally grave, then, without a word, he turned and left the room; but just before he turned, he dropped the little leather case into her lap.

CHAPTER XXV

THE HISTORY OF THE BLACK PEARL

"July 29th, 1879,
"Rue de L'——,
"Dieppe.

"Dear Mr. Southern,—I have been a long time writing to acknowledge those three delightful letters, but you are not to call me neglectful or ungrateful. I have been thinking a great deal of you and your home and the happy time you gave me in it. I've been trying to decide what answers to give to your questions. Shall they be honest or dishonest?

"Even with the pen in my hand, I am not sure which of

the two spirits watching over me will get its way.

"What am I doing? Well, I am going from one gay watering place to another, and I am coming into contact with a number of people. What sort of life am I leading? That's surely the same question, in another shape; but it is not so easy to answer, for, truly, I don't seem to be leading anything, least of all anything so vast and pitiless as life. To myself I seem to be a picture—father's picture, at which he is always looking through half-shut eyes, like an artist at his masterpiece, wondering how it is going to strike his great patron, the public. Now you are frowning, but the grandmother is smiling. I told you about her. I showed you her face in the locket round my neck. She has been there ever since I was seven years old. She is the mother of my father, and you said I was very like her. You said many kind things to me, but none quite so kind as that. For she might have been your grandmother. You might have taken her to your Long Gallery, and she would have looked at the fine folks there with the same half-sweet, half-proud expression with which she looked out at you

and me from the gilt circle, and they would have looked back as at an equal. Even at seven years old I knew she was not our equal—father's and mine. She never came to us and we never went to her, and father would not speak of her. But I was a little pitcher with very long ears, and I had a nursemaid called Anna. From her I learnt, by listening and coaxing, that though a grandmother is a near relation there is a yet nearer one. It seemed I had a mother, who could never go into anybody's Long Gallery. She belonged first to a wine-shop in Paris, then to a troupe of traveling players, then to a great many other things I couldn't understand at all then, and don't very well understand now. Then, for a time-such a short time, she belonged to father; she was his wife and she was my mother. But I cried a great deal and made her head ache, and presently she went back to the mystery out of which she came; but it was she who made the story of our lives so ugly. When people have been hurt and betrayed, when those they love more than reason play them false, they do wild and foolish things in their longing to escape from memory. Father went to the green tables, where there is plenty of noise and plenty of laughter and excitement and the chance of making a fortune. We are princes one day and beggars the next. Often we live in grand hotels, and often we slip out of our fine rooms in the night and fly to others, where, again, we order the best of everything and trust to the green tables to pay. It was in one of these big hotels that we met your father, and I think he was sorry to see a girl so young as I in such a strange position. He spoke kindly to me, and one evening he accepted father's invitation to our rooms.

"And there, on an impulse I think, he gave that wonderful invitation to visit him in his home. There are people who will tell you that it was more kind than wise to ask us under his roof, and they will tell you the truth; for you belong to honesty and we belong to fraud, and you must never again come very near us, as one never ought to go very near a person with an infectious disease. But I will write

to you just twice a year, and you shall answer and tell me that Mr. Calder is alive (if it is life he lives in that great room full of books), and that Mrs. Meadows is making the pot-pourri; you shall tell me it was no midsummer dream into which I came, and that you are real-a man with a sun-brown face, going out into the forest to hunt some creature he is far too kind to want to catch and kill.

"And now the letter is written, and it was the spirit of the lost grandmother who won the day, who forces me to

sign myself your grateful friend of a summer only.

"GWENDOLEN LACY."

Alva raised sparkling eyes from the perusal of this document. It flattered her to realize that her instinct had been true, had pierced a way through the obstinate silence about her, to this very point chance now condescended to reveal.

Eagerly she picked up the second letter.

"August, 1881,
"VILLA INCONNUE, "SWITZERLAND.

"DEAR GEORGE,-You will be angry that I again conceal my address, but you talked of following me, and that I will never allow.

"You ask me in your letter if my second visit to The Court was a disappointment, and I am afraid my answer must be 'yes.' But you are not to think that it was you or yours who failed to give a cordial welcome; it was not. was I who failed in the power to accept it. You see, George, I am two years older than on that first occasion, and I have had two extra years in my school of adventure.

"At seventeen I am a woman, a wise woman, a horribly wise woman. Not the woman for you, George. The grandmother says so. You used to laugh at our mimic companionship, hers and mine, but it is very real for all that, and she is very real, though she has gone now, without a word of pity or understanding. It is she who draws the line so firmly between us, for she is of the old school, dear.

father was the apple of her eye, but she never forgave. And her justification is in the Bible too; the punishment must go down to the third and fourth generation—the punishment of weakness and frailty, the punishment of my dead mother and my living father, of myself, of my unborn children.

"I wasn't strong enough to keep my promise; I had to come back into your fairy house and all it offered me; but I'm strong enough to say 'no' to your wonderful offer, and wise enough to understand that it is not cruelty I give you in exchange for those dear pages of appeal.

"Now you rage, and now you laugh at the line of division, but you haven't lain awake for long hours of the

night, learning all that it means.

"You have never seen anything but love, or at least respect, on the faces about you; I have never seen anything but a smirk. You wouldn't like to see that smirk, George, on the faces of your friends when you presented your wife to them. For a time your anger would be for those who refused to pay her homage, but presently, against your will, it would be for the one who brought the curse upon the house.

"You call me hard, but I'm not that. There are times when I'm tempted to forget everything but the pleasure and the promise of the hour. I wake in the early morning and I look to the east, where the sun is getting up, with the dogstar at his side, just as he used to do only a week ago at The Court, and the ache in my breast is almost unendurable. I want the woods below my window, and your voice calling me into them, and the feel of your hand as you pull me through the thick undergrowth. I want youthe first chum I ever had. But I lost you the day that I turned you into a lover. It's right and just, for I did it wantonly. You would have been sorry for me, kind to me, but you would never have written those imploring letters if -if-I hadn't made you. How? When? Why? God -no-the devil knows-or the woman in the wine-shop. You certainly didn't. You only understood after I had gone

259

away. I stole from you so deftly, with such a child-like air of innocence, it was impossible to tell, until you found yourself alone with an empty heart, that you had been despoiled.

"And so it's 'no,' and it's the kindest word I've ever said to you, and it's 'good-bye,' which means: 'I keep you in my heart, though not in my life,' and, for the last time, I GWENNY." sign myself,—Your loving

Alva looked up from the reading of this letter, with her first hint of distress. Why, she paused to ask herself, had these lines fallen into her hands on this momentous night of her own fortunes? The veil was growing very thin between her intuition and the secret that had for so long magnetized it. Shivering a little as with a premonition of what was coming, she turned to the remaining sheets in her lap, and with an effort to steady the trembling of her hands, embarked upon the topmost one.

August 6th, 1882.

"DEAR GEORGE,-You did very wrong to force from others the address that I refused you, but I, too, did wrong when I broke that solemn vow, and came a third time into the house I swore to spare.

"In all the fairy-tales, three is the fatal number, and oh! it was indeed in our case. You say I can't help myselfyou talk of duty binding us, but, dear George, I haven't yet made plain the sort of stuff you want to weave into the

web of your life.

"You haven't guessed it, but there are natures so constructed, that, with all the will in the world to be just and kind, they are bound to move in a sidelong fashion, or in a circle. They never get anywhere. Now those pink-andwhite ancestresses of yours had their whims and fancies; they shed their tears and pouted their prejudices, but they agreed to be urged in one direction, either by their pride of nature or their pride of race, or by an experienced mother.

"And we give this constitutionally forward movement many names, but it has always one result; a bulwark is formed against the dangerous tide of human passion; a house stands as your does, and gathers beneath its shadow the fortunes of many smaller ones, less securely built. Your wife, dear, is more, far more, than the charmer of your fancy. She is the star to which all the weak and feebly educated on your estate have to look up. At this point I can almost hear you say: 'But these are noble thoughts, and they are hers, and-so-she must be noble.' But no-for here comes the serpent into the sweet garden. I have the eye to see and the heart to understand, but I am no simple cup to hold the wine of life in trust for the thirsty. I am the child of a play-actress—of a woman who could touch the sublime and the ridiculous, and yet remain the enemy of civilization. She could draw tears and smiles, remorse and virtue, from those she spoke to, but her power was evil, and my power over you is evil. It is not by goodness that I draw you, it is by fascination. I have a strange look and strange movements; you cannot fathom them or me, and it is wonder that goes a-hunting. I told you that it was I who turned my friend into my lover, and when I had him at my mercy, I spoke grandly of resignation. It was only talk, George; I came back at the first hint of pressure—to the woodland, to the dear deluded boy. The game was unfinished, and it was too exciting to give up. The game—do you hear? Do you understand at last the nature of the barrier between us? It was a game to me, and though I can't deny my heart was in it, the hearts of such creatures as myself are in many things. The playactress is at once true to all and true to none; each character has its hour—no more, no less.

"Listen—for here lies your road to liberty, and, as a man of honor, you will be obliged to take it. It was twothirds love of adventure, and one-third love of you that drove me, on tiptoe, that momentous night, up to the playroom under the roof. I passed your door softly, but not so softly, George, as to fail to arouse the sleepless lover that the morning was to rob. I tell you it was artistic hunger, and not great human necessity that lured me to the spot where we had spent so many happy and innocent hours. I flew to my first lover, not to my only lover, and, if I played my part with zeal, with tears, with passion, is it to be wondered at, seeing of what stock I come?

"We set the window open, and there were roses tapping at the pane, filling the room with their scent. There was no moon, but there was the faint blue of a summer night, and your face looked unfamiliar by it. You thought to see the finger of providence in that meeting, but I tell you it was the common stage, set up in every little fancy fair, for the common representation of most common passions. It was a game—an enchanting game; and I shall carry the memory of it to my grave with me, but not into everyday life. For to me it was an incident. There will be others, and marriage is the next. I undertake it gladly; it cuts so many knots. Even the grandmother is pleased, for he is a free man, though rich. He hurts no one by his chance. There is no history connected with his name, save the history of his father's and his own financial shrewdness. And you will marry too, George. You will go down those countless stairs—far down to where the wise people sit in the rooms of state; and she will be waiting—take my word for it, she will be waiting for you—the wife for whom you will never have to blush or fight. She'll love you a little less hotly, maybe, but she'll love you longer, George; and I give you to her-no-I force you on to her, in the name of all that's fair and fit and pre-ordained.

"It isn't quite the world we thought it was going to be on those summer mornings, but it's good enough for people of sanity. There are other woods than yours, with magic scent and magic birds and beasts. I'm going away to find such an one. I'm to have a year of freedom; I bought it with my promise; and he—the man whose life I am to share—is not afraid to let me go. He knows I shall not break my word to him, for it's not the sort of promise I

made to you. It's a solid bond of mutual interest. Wince at it, sneer at it—but there it is, not to be upset, like all my

finest resolutions, by an impulse.

"Call it a tribute to our idyll, if the ache in your heart grows unbearable—for a year I will touch no other hand in love. Or, if there's anger enough in your veins (and I pray there may be), call it a spurt into action of that gipsy blood my mother left me with. I'm going into some remote corner of the earth, with an honest, stupid German peasant girl. I'm to be cut off even from the postman. There's no friend you could bribe to betray my hiding-place, for I've trusted none. And long before the time of solitude is over, the fever will be out of your blood, and you will have learned to say:

"'She was very dear and very impossible; and for what I and my children have escaped, the Lord make me truly

thankful."

The letter fluttered to the ground, whither its predecessors had fallen, and Alva stared, fascinated with horror, at the one still remaining in her lap. Here was the final revelation, waiting to put the climax to this drama her fancy had painted in such different colors. Many suspicions and convictions hovered about her ingenious mind, but none would settle, so violent was her recoil from the lurid picture just presented to her. Was it possible that a creature so instinct with gentle feeling should be able thus to divide susceptibility from its inspiring force? Did the blood of a play-actress really answer such a riddle and satisfy such a man? What lay behind that cry for a year of mourning? The last letter was to tell, and it was very long, longer than all the rest.

" Jan. 10th, 1883.

And then without name or address:-

"We are trapped by what the agnostics call the laws of nature, but which my reason calls the laws of God. That impious cry of mine, 'so far and no farther,' is to be treated as the waves treated the command of Canute. "I lied to you, and I thought to have my excuse, but it would take a wiser head than yours or mine to say now where noble resignation ended and romantic folly began.

"Perhaps if I had in me the power to stick to the lie—to pay the full price of it, I should be justified; but, George,

I haven't.

"Here's the flaw in sexual love: it will bear so much and no more; it will bear many of the ills flesh is heir to, but not all. I thought I was strong enough to live the scorn of your intelligence, the lover of any one—of every one; but I'm not. I can only live co-victim with you of the rude forces of nature, for you were no incident. How could I write the word? and how—how could you ever believe it? But it's not reproach I send you, it's the story—the awful unexpected story that is too heavy for me to bear alone.

"I came, as I promised you, into a remote corner of the earth. I came when the summer was far gone, and when all things seemed as nerveless and lethargic as myself. Gradually the few invaders from the cities drifted back to their work, and I was left with none but peasant faces round me.

"The common, civilized points of view were concealed. Days came and went in melancholy sequence. Nature was dying, without pain and without protest. I used to gaze, for hours at a time, at the leaves as they fluttered down to carpet the moist earth. When the sun shone, the yellow ones turned to gold and the dull browns to copper; but these brilliant colors seemed incongruous, even cruel, like gaily dressed persons at a funeral.

"My story is coming very slowly, but you must remember that nature told it to me more slowly still. It took a long time to disentangle anything personal out of this

panoramic display of death.

"Sometimes I looked away from the grim sorceress; I looked into my glass, but the pale face there made no impression on my imagination. I looked down at my hands,

and found the veins showing in unfamiliar fashion. I looked at the ring you put on one of the fingers, and the black pearl was melancholy and unbeautiful as myself.

"Sometimes I removed the ring and read the motto of your house: 'Ne cede malis,' but always with the same dazed feeling of inconsequence. I was not yielding to evil, but, like the year itself, to inertia. I was passive, until—oh, be patient! the story is coming at last—until the first frost crept into the forest. Then in me, too, there came a stir, an impulse. A first rush of life into long paralyzed limbs is painful, but at first the pain was welcome. It was

stimulating, and I was growing weary of inaction.

"Soon I was a living, pulsing being again, more sentient, I think, than I had ever been before. I looked into the gloomy forest, and saw it young and green again. Under the glass upon the mountain lakes and streams I caught the sound of the subdued laughter of imprisoned powers. The dead leaves crackled under my feet, but it was of resurrection. Nothing doubted, nothing was afraid; it was all a question of time and patience. Thinking of St. George's, Hanover Square, one had to smile, for these natural aisles, under which one walked so boldly, were composed of pillars in which miraculous essence lay concealed.

"Society seemed a tiny speck on the horizon line, but, like the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, this speck suddenly began to grow; and then it grew until the whole heaven was overcast, for it was an echo from the outside world—no more, no less—that brought the deluge on my

helpless head.

"It came through a couple of tourists, seeking, as I had sought, the untrodden ways. They dropped a fashionable paper in their rooms, and, after their departure, the inn-keeper found and sent it round to the English lady, who looked, I don't doubt, in need of some tonic. She obtained two pieces of information out of it. One was a month or two old, the other brand new. Old Sir George Southern was dead, and young Sir George, in spite of (perhaps because of) his mourning, was about to take Bertha Venner

with a vengeance. But under all the agony there is a grain of comprehension, George. You went too fast down those hundreds of steps; but, was it to be wondered at, when the spirit of the play-room spoke so cruelly and so falsely? You fled to the fine lady, and perhaps she came halfway up to meet you. My pride will write the tale that way, at all events. You were always dependent for your happiness on human sympathy, and your trust and your simplicity had been tampered with—tainted. You had to touch some kind and reassuring hand, and hers was nearest.

"Oh, I understood, but the shock was too much for me. I was ill for weeks, and I put off the hour of explanation. I never dreamt of a speedy marriage (there are many now who say you didn't either). I thought Bertha would never agree to be married quietly; but in that I misjudged her. I thought there was time to spare—time to get strong, before I sat down and wrote the letter that should bring you back to me. For I meant to bring you back. I was bound to call you back, by all the laws of fair-play. I was actually writing to you when the news came, the news of your sudden marriage. I had put myself, a week or so before, in communication with Minnie, my old friend at The Court, and it was from her I heard it.

"Then indeed the darkness of utter despair closed over me. I called wildly to Minnie, but she could not come, for she was going through deep waters of her own. She had married disastrously, and she too was to bring a child into the world. She promised to come to me as soon as she should be strong again, but I could not wait. The forest was a friend no more. I craved for the kindly touch of human hands, for the pleasant sound of English voices. I came to England. I sent my little German maid away, and went to Derbyshire, to Minnie's old home, where her mother had a cottage. The woman was nearly mindless, and she tended me with the mechanical devotion that is so soothing to a distracted mind.

"Now you must listen closely, for the story is no more of fancies but of facts; it is the true story of many lives, though the world is not to hear it—only you, who must suffer with me, as you cannot have happiness with me.

"First there was the death of Minnie's child, caused, they say, by the brutality of her drunken husband. He was shipped to the Colonies, as you will know, and she was called to play foster-mother to Emmy Dane's little girl; for Emmy died when the child came, at her mother's flat in Pont Street, and you, who know something of the Dane marriage, will perhaps be no more surprised than I was at Emmy giving up the ghost. Even Mrs. Fawcett must have felt some sort of compunction at the result of her match-making, for when Minnie arrived she was in bed with nervous break-down, and George Dane had fled promptly to the Continent. Soon she had the reins of government in her kind, capable hands; she managed everybody, the doctor included, and by-and-by she saw her way to answer my imploring letters, as well as the appealing cry of the baby in her arms. It was very delicate, and Minnie had reason on her side when she asked to take it into her country air. The grandmother was thankful to be released from that reproachful wail for a time; and on a day in spring I went to the station to meet my only friend and her charge.

"It was a day of sunshine and soft sweet air. There were lambs in all the meadows, looking white as driven snow beside their grimy mothers. I was ready to see hope in everything that day—until I saw the wizened face behind the veil that Minnie raised so cautiously. There was death in that face, though we fiercely denied it to one another. We spoke of the magic of the hill air, and we tended the tiny creature zealously. A doctor came each morning from the nearest village in the valley below. He belonged to what is called the old school, and, happily, it is nearly moribund. He had but few ideas and opinions left in his white head, and he was unaffectedly glad of ours; but Minnie knew, and I knew, that it mattered little whether he were

wise or foolish. If the mountain air and our devotion failed to bring an impetus into those dull veins, no earthly man of science could achieve the miracle. And the child passed out with no sharper protest than a sigh, and, not many hours later, my little girl came in to take the empty

place.

"I couldn't tell you, if I tried, how the idea of definite intrigue came to us, though I think it was the unconscious baby who first brought it. She took so gladly to all that the other had forsaken: to the luxurious cot, to our smiles and blandishments, to the despoiled Minnie, for I was too weak to nurse her myself. And the foolish doctor had been accustomed to call me by any name that came uppermost. I was Mrs. Dane or Mrs. Brand (Minnie's married name), or, just occasionally, Mrs. Foster—the name I called myself. It was Minnie who told the lies necessary to the position, and signed the death certificate; and when the mist began to clear away from my faculties (for I had been very ill) I found the position captured. We said very little about it to one another, but I knew by the look on my nurse's face that she would stick to the tale she had toldthe tale that nobody seemed to question, and she was not ashamed of it or afraid of it. Almost she persuaded me by her manner that necessity is not only the mother of invention but the legitimate mother of it.

"There's the story, George, the terrible, audacious, unfinished story. For the little girl who went back to the flat in Pont Street and a delighted grandmother is ours; and though she's saved to her class, it's far from certain she'll be happy in the nest we stole for her. She'll breathe our thoughts in an incongruous place—she won't understand the flesh-pots; she'll be hurt, punished, puzzled, and we must not put out an understanding finger. Duplicity has to pay the price like everything else, and only time can prove the

value of our momentous lie.

"Why have I told you what can only torture and frighten? Because, as I said at the beginning, our love has its limit. I must bring you into the horrible circle where I revolve so fearfully. I must be bound to you by something,

even if it's only a mutual sense of dismay.

"Bertha has the name and the ring—the plain ring, that is to say. The black pearl is to stay upon my finger until I learn the real lesson of renunciation, and then I shall give

it up.

"Bertha will give you children you may love in the open, but for every tender word and look you bestow on them you are to set aside just such another for the child of your first love. You are to steal sometimes to the little play-room and call, oh so softly! We shall come, George—she and I. We're not revengeful. It is the world that has treated us hardly, not you, dearest and kindest, who were despoiled in your hour of weakness, as Samson in his sleep.

"Soon my year of liberty will be over, and I must go back to keep my word. I'm not sorry to go. I want a definite and unassailable prison wall to keep my wild heart and its longings within bounds. And I'm not altogether unhappy. You're not to think it. In a sense you're mine, as

the grandmother in the locket was mine.

"This letter is to go into the fire, but the thought of Gwenny is to go deep down into your heart; it's to be kept beautiful in spite of all the terrible memories in which it is to be wrapped.

"My face is to be always young, always kind, always

turned to yours."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE HOUR BEFORE THE DAWN

ABRUPTLY as it had begun, the document ended.

The story was over, and Alva began binding the sheets together, stooping to pick up those that had fallen to the floor. When all were safe once more in the faded pocket-book, she looked up, staring fixedly into the shadowy corner of the room.

She had trembled at the premonition of danger, but, though the actual attack must have surpassed the wildest promise of her imagination, oddly enough it left her, for the moment, at least, cool and collected. So astounding was the revelation, so illimitable were the vistas of new countries opened out by it, that the threat to her material welfare passed unobserved.

To do her folly justice, the vaunt of spiritual independence was not all profane. Her passion for the seats of the mighty was romantic and intellectual rather than mundane, and there were few depths of mental anguish and shame into which she was not prepared to follow this unexpected and tragic figure of a progenitress. She had recoiled from the confession of ignominy, with which the ineffectual martyr had striven to erect a barrier between herself and happiness, but the lapse from conventional law, out of which this train of events (her own life included) had sprung, caused her no sense of revolt.

It was without effort and without disdain that she crept down towards that circle of pain in which Gwenny lay huddled, the victim of her own too involved construction.

At first the sympathy was analytical rather than emotional. It was engrossing to trace, at last, the source of

that mysterious stream on which she had floated so constantly and so far. The influence of the house was explained. Had it not been her cradle in all the finer senses of the term? Explained, too, was something of her own temperament. Was she not at once a great lady and a gipsy-aristocrat and bohemian? Nature had planned her out as a battlefield for the whims and passions of circumstances, sundered as the poles. There were hundreds of memories flocking to disgorge their contributions at the feet of this wonderful discovery, and eagerly she groped among them for the most pregnant. There was the picture in the Gallery, before which she had stopped so often, from which Minnie had always scurried away, like a scared rabbit. Now she understood. The face had been too familiar to be recognized; she had seen it daily in her glass; the brown eyes, warm with dreams; the long white neck, bent a little to the side and a little to the back, throwing forward the chin and the mouth with its slightly parted lips. It was the very closeness of the secret that had worsted her ingenuity. She had been too near to get a general effect.

And, presently, a yet more vital memory came to herthe memory of Griselda—the child whom he might love in the open. She recalled the night in the conservatory: the dim light, the brief battle. More than once it had caused her vanity a stab to recall the ease with which the simple girl (so she described her) had directed the destiny of herself, the complex one. They had spoken of sacrifice, but Alva had always repudiated the term in her inmost consciousness. Even her own need of definite movement had failed quite to satisfy, as she sat waiting for the man she had pledged herself to accept. Now the matter was comprehensible. Griselda had been the inconsequent tool. She had touched the spring, but the god in the machine was older, wilier than a schoolgirl crying for a first lover. Griselda had talked of The Court-of the men and women who would not die; but countless nursemaids had told the self-same tale to innumerable children; the assertions, of themselves, were valueless, unproven. But now she realized that it was the atmosphere invoked which had the power to breed in both their fancies. Griselda had spoken—to a sister.

Consciously in one heart, unconsciously in the other, was a passion for this old house. It spoke from the first, with the petulance of an acknowledged sense of wrong; from the second, with the vigor of an emotion that could find no ground of justification, save in the shadow of occultism.

It was soothing to Alva's pride to understand that she had been worsted by an invisible and powerful army, not

by an eloquent little half-sister.

But this sensation was the last of its pleasant kind she was to experience for some time. At the thought of her new kindred, the memory of Anthony swept suddenly across her mind, like a sheet of fire, and it was only by an

effort that she restrained her cry.

"A brother!" she muttered, and realized, upon the moment, the nature of that vaunt of self-control each had been so quick to call an individual superiority to the herd. With a shudder she released her grip of the leather case, and it fell to the floor. She looked down at it as one looks at a snake in the grass, fearing a movement, incapable of making one towards escape.

To avoid the pit of destruction by so frail a chance! She thought of his own words: "We'll draw it fine—our line of adventure." How little he had dreamt that, at that very moment, they were balanced on a gossamer thread above

annihilation!

These letters were meant for the fire. What great and secret hand had held them back? What great and secret mind, forecasting the need of the future, had preserved these sole witnesses of an impediment to their union before which social condemnation paled into insignificance?

Alva had succumbed to more intangible influences than that of religion, and suddenly an appreciation of her long course of profanity struck her into terror. These were not fairies that filled the room, they were avenging, outraged spirits. Was there no advocate among them?

"Gwenny," she called softly, wildly. "Gwenny, dear little friend, dear little mother. Come to me. You love me, that's why you let me go. You came to my wedding. Oh, I haven't forgotten. I saw you, I felt your kiss, and is wasn't like the rest. I hadn't time then to guess why; I was asleep; but now I'm waking. and to a world that hates me. They're closing in on me, the People Downstairs. But tell them it wasn't all my fault; tell them about the grandmother in the locket and the mother out of the wineshop. I didn't start fair, Gwenny. I was tricked in my cradle. I was given to a woman of the world-I, your child of the wood-land, the child of love and fancy and resignation. You said you understood; you said the story wasn't finished, the penalty wasn't paid. I'm going to pay it, Gwenny, in shame and remorse and fear. You sent me the ring—the ring with the black pearl, that was only to leave your finger when you had learnt the full meaning of sacrifice. You gave it, and I took it. I've taken everything, from everybody, love and trust; and I've given nothing back."

With a moan she dropped her head upon her arms, but presently she raised it and spoke again, in the same low, awed voice, looking into the same shadowy corner with the

same eyes of terror.

"There was no fire that night, and no moon; only the blue light and the scent of the late roses at the window. There was no sound except the beating of your two hearts and the voice of fate, whispering: 'It is written so.' You were weak with love and longing, and the thought of the cruel day coming to rob you of one another. I can see you, you dear boy and girl: you're coming near to me; you're going to touch me; you're going to put your kind, warm arms about me—but, oh! you mustn't; I couldn't bear it. It isn't you who are the ghosts; you're all human with pity and kindness, here in the room where you felt so much, and where I—the real ghost—the thing of emptiness and chill—have felt nothing—nothing!"

She put out her arms, as though to ward off the on-

slaught of some dreaded force, then she let them fall again, and, slipping from her seat, she pressed her head on the hard wooden surface of it, while she rocked her body to and fro with the swinging motion of the chair. In prompt response to this unqualified attitude of surrender, the handle of the door turned softly, but Alva was too absorbed in her own outburst to hear the step of the intruder. Only when she felt his arm about her did she start and turn her disfigured face to his.

"Leave me alone, Peter."

"I can't. I never could, you know. It was horrible, darling, but it's over, and they didn't mean to wrong you. They suffered too."

She laughed bitterly, still trying, though ineffectually, to

release herself from his hold.

"It's not their story that is horrible; you know that as well as I do. It's mine. Theirs was, at least, a story of life—of love—of pain and courage. Mine is the story of a life that never was a life at all; it was a dream, an awful, ridiculous dream; years and years, and nothing to show for them."

But now there was appeal in her accent, and she was yielding to his touch, demanding of it, but he could find no words in which to offer reassurance.

"You can't find anything to say, Peter. There isn't anything, except those dreadful words in the Bible that keep running round in my head: 'Thou hast been weighed in the balance and found wanting.' I haven't anything to set against them. I've helped nobody. I've loved nobody. I'm more alone than anybody in the world. Even you can't stay beside me, though you said 'for better, for worse' in such a wonderful voice, Peter. You think I didn't hear, but I did, though I was so sound asleep. I'd like it to be true, but of course it isn't. They all say it, and they say it boldly, when we look beautiful and when we are full of mystery. But when our faces are spoiled with crying, when the mystery has turned out to be a sordid one, they stand back—they're silent, as you are."

There was a hint of her old petulance in the appeal, and it relieved him to hear it.

"I never can find much to say, Alva, but I never stand away unless you ask me to, and I never shall. There's the virtue of people like myself; we're constant. I have to share with you; if you're unhappy, so am I."

She remained silent for a time, her cheek against his. But presently the whisper broke out again, and now there was tenderness in it; there was the note so long thirsted

for, and eagerly he drank the sound of it.

"It isn't fair! You ought to stand away; I'm ugly and worthless—a girl without a name, and you're the only protector I can find. Oh, aren't you ashamed to show so little

pride?"

"One can't have everything," he told her almost gaily; "there isn't room for pride along with so much love. And you mustn't talk of having no name. You've mine, and nobody has a better right to it. I wanted to give it you the very first time I met you, and I've never wanted to give it to anybody else. That's God's truth, Alva, and a mystery

for you at the same time."

"Peter, I'm frightened. I've talked of fairies and ghosts and spirits, but it was none of these that stopped me. I vowed to go the way of my fancy—east and west and south and north, hunting for new sensations as a child hunts for shells. I was all ready to go, and somebody—something—stopped me. Who was the somebody? What was the something? I only know that it was a power I haven't allowed to count, and it was waiting in the dark all these years. It was stronger than any force I've ever conceived, and it's shaken all my will—all my courage, out of me. All my multitude of dainty imaginings are scattered, like a flight of timid birds before an exploding gun. My faith in myself has gone. Is it God, Peter, who plays with our boast of independence like this?"

"I call him God still," said the young man gravely.

"There are other names, but I like the old one best. It

seems to bring him nearer-make him kinder."

"Yes," said Alva wistfully, "it does. I've come so far from first principles and first names. It frightens me to think of the length of the way back. I'd better begin by going downstairs, as far as our room. Take me back, Peter, to the life I've never tried to live."

As he helped her to rise from that position of abandonment, he put his foot on the leather case and stooped to

secure it.

"They must be burnt to-night," he said; but she laid hands on his with a low cry.

"Burn the letters?—never! Burn all I have of her?—never! He couldn't and Minnie couldn't, and—I can't!"

"But I can and must," Peter insisted. "They've done their work, and they must go—in fairness to her, Alva, as

well as to you."

"It wouldn't be fair to her," Alva argued excitedly; "it's my turn to pay something. In her heart she must want me, and I'm going to her, even if my going betrays the secret."

"Exactly what you would be sure to say and do," he said, so caustically as to startle her.

"But it's sacrifice, Peter. I want to take my share."

"It's extravagance," he corrected; "it's one of those dramatic invitations you've always accepted. Think a moment; she's given her whole life to save her point—your welfare, and you want to make her life-long silence useless. She's got one thing to keep her from despair; the thought that you are safe and happy; that she paid for two, and you want to take that thought from her, and give her, instead, a scene from a melodrama."

Alva took her hands from his and turned her face from the fire.

"Burn them, Peter; be quick, or I might change my mind!"

He thrust sheet after sheet into the flames, where they crackled merrily, and with a sob she stared fiercely at the window.

The light was coming out of the east. It lay in bars of

color along the bare boards of the room. Suddenly it seemed to Alva that warmth and promise were creeping in too, creeping towards her. Soon the little messengers of hope would touch her feet and climb up her long white dressing-gown. Smiling she turned back into the room.

dressing-gown. Smiling she turned back into the room.

"I shall remember," she said, almost eagerly; "it's only the paper we've burnt. The words are in my heart. Take me down, Peter. I want to be quick and begin the new

life."

A little doubtfully he looked at this unexpected exhibition of enthusiasm. It smacked too strongly of ancient tendency to altogether satisfy him; but as he led her down those narrow, winding stairs, as he felt her hands clinging to him, felt her breath on his cheek, it was impossible not to quicken with some sort of happy prognostication.

As they reached their bedroom, a loud knocking could be heard, and Alva paused, looking nervously in the direction of the door opposite. When opened, rather impatiently, by Peter, a maid was discovered, cold and aggrieved, with an ulster and a shawl over her night attire.

"I thought I'd never get nobody to 'ear; you was that sound asleep. It's this note, Sir Peter, for my lady. A man come with it, in a dogcart, and as nobody seemed to 'ear 'is knocking and ringing, save Nora and me, I 'ad to come down."

Peter took the missive and brought it to his wife. Holding it under the light of the nearest candle, which had burnt low in its socket during her long absence upstairs, Alva read the following lines:—

"November 10th,
"Monk's Revel.

"DEAR LADY SOUTHERN,—My mother is ill, and the doctors hold out little hope of her recovery. Chill complications and a tendency to let the fire go out—that's the case, so far as I can gather it.

"She calls repeatedly for a woman in your household—Minnie Brand, and I've taken the liberty of sending a dog-

cart. Sick people are apt to be insistent, so forgive the unseemliness of the hour.

"As you may suppose, my time and my thoughts are engrossed by this sudden misfortune, the illness only taking a serious turn during my absence last night.

"I feel sure I can count on your sympathy and under-

standing, and remain,-Yours very truly,

"ANTHONY GLOVER."

"Peter," she said faintly, and held the note out to him.

He gave her a warning glance, for the girl was within earshot, and, having mastered the contents, he went once more to the door.

"You're to wake Minnie—without fuss, mind, and tell her to dress. She's wanted by a sick friend; she's to drive back in the cart waiting below. Tell her I'll be down to see her start."

Ignoring the air of astonishment with which the girl regarded his day-dress, he closed the door on her and came quickly to his wife. Only by infinite trouble did he succeed in quelling what promised to be a second collapse into despair. She implored him to take her to her mother, but, though his resolute pertinacity and careful train of reasoning eventually silenced her, it was plain that the optimistic spirit of the last few minutes was quenched again.

"You shall go directly she asks for you consciously," he promised. "At present it is Minnie that she wants—Minnie, who knows her secret, who can tell her that you are well and safe. I am going to speak to her before she starts, and tell her that no one will ever have the power to take you away from me again. She shall pass that news on, if it seems advisable. Alva, you must trust us all to act

for the best."

Her head fell, acquiescent but disconsolate, against the back of the big chair into which she had fallen, and he was compelled to leave her and hurry downstairs.

Surely, she thought, left to herself and the horrors of

the situation—surely this was the punishment she had evoked. All but she were called upon for their quota of sacrifice. She had elected to receive, never to give, and the impious choice was now wreaking upon her its belated vengeance. None would take from so poisoned a stream as her generosity; she was doomed to sit apart, a goddess on a lofty throne, into whose lap humanity was to pour innumerable gifts, which she was powerless to enjoy or to return.

But as she heard the wheels of the carriage below crunch the gravel, an entirely different emotion came to her mind.

Instead of a Niobe, Peter came back to a business woman.

"Why, there's the money!" she exclaimed, almost before he had crossed the threshold. "Twenty thousand pounds, Peter, and more to come. We've no choice. In common honesty we're bound to tell."

Peter was nonplused by this abrupt change of mood, but

not, it seemed, by her argument.

"I thought of that while you were reading the letters, but I don't recognize any such pressure. No, Alva, we're going to keep the secret and the money too."

"But it isn't honest," she began, staring at him as though

he were a stranger, seen for the first time.

For a moment an extraordinary and dreadful explanation of his patience, his restraint, his resolution, flashed into her mind, and involuntarily he laughed, seeing the nature of it.

"No. I'm not a fortune-hunter, Alva, I'm a humorist, for once in my life. I'm going to make a joke, a practical joke. There's actually a grain of amusement to be got out of this appalling situation. I'm going to turn your grandmother, against her will, into a philanthropist."

"Peter!" she gasped, and the corners of her mouth

quivered.

"Don't laugh, or you'll be crying directly. Yes. It's perfectly feasible. The sick shall be healed and the poor made merry, all at her unconscious expense. Every penny

she puts into your hand you pass on. Oh, she won't put many more, once she sees the game. She'll be rampant, but that will only make it all the funnier. She'll call us cranks, because, you see, we can't endow the people on our own estate; they're not poor enough. She may call us harder names, as will our friends, on occasion; but you won't mind, will you? We'll take the wrong names together."

The note he finished on was charged with earnestness, and the light of amusement died out of her tremulous face.

She made no reply, but she held out her hands, and he folded them tenderly within his own.

"They seem tractable," he said, with an effort after lightness; "it isn't only another phase, is it?"

"Don't let it be a phase," she whispered.

But, when, on an impulse of pity and adoration, too strong to be restrained, he lifted the meek hands to his lips, she snatched them from him with all her old air of

extravagant passion.

"That's how Merlin died, and hundreds more, as wise and as kind and as good as you. They say we murdered them, but it was they who poisoned us, with the sight of the rust on their swords and on their faculties, with their renunciation of mastery, with their passion-sick glances. No, Peter, it isn't the old story, though, perhaps, it's the grain of truth at the bottom of all the fiction; it's history, not the fairy-tale. The ancestors can teach one thing: that you must love with more demand. One doesn't learn to be a wife on undiluted worship; one learns to be an idol. You must give me something beside love."

His dark eyes gave her, apparently, the promise that she sought in them, for with a smile, a sigh, an influx of something like gaiety into her movements, she left her seat and crossed to the window. She unlatched one of the panes and set it ajar. The light in the east had grown much brighter; it flooded the broad stretch of land on to which she looked out; it dazzled her eyes, and, for a mo-

ment, she laid her hand across them; then she looked out

again, and sniffed the air with appreciation.

"A frost," she said gratefully. "It runs into your veins like wine, killing all the germs of horror born of this fearful night. It's very sharp as well as sweet; it will kill the last of the flowers too; but never mind, they'll bloom again, or their children will. It's a pretty story, isn't it, if only one reads far enough? Life in the dead—no—in the undying breast. I'll have to be romantic to the end. This is the garden where Gwenny used to play; I can't drive all her fairies out of it. Peter, she cut her name on the sundial, in the middle—impious, wasn't it? And yet—and yet—we cut the invisible letters of our names in still more sacred places."

With a fall of spirit and eyes of appeal, she looked back into the room, into the quiet face of the man behind her, and, with an effort, he found the word of consolation for

which she mutely begged.

"One forgets the knife when the name is sweet."

"And mine?" she whispered.

"Alva—the dawn—the beginning of life—find me a sweeter one."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MOUSE AGAIN

Anthony had put his mother's case aptly, if callously.

A neglected cold had provoked her illness, but behind the cold lay that disregard of life that is so fatal to its continuance. There was in her no desire to fight. Indeed, whenever a spasm of pain passed through and out of her, she felt as if she had been approached and deserted again by some friend with rough manners, whose going left her more conscious than before of desolation. Physical torment could create for her what kinder forces could not—brief spells of respite from that array of memories whose pressure, like the single drop of water falling on one spot, constitutes so exquisite a mode of punishment.

As the faces of her attendants lengthened, hers took, for all its frailty, an aspect of buoyancy, long foreign to its

grave type of beauty.

The malady threatened lungs and heart, to find each organ void of the protective spirit of opposition. Fever slipped into the blood, to run unquestioned, welcome even, through the veins, and the sick woman began to babble happily of far-away events, whose quarrel with her actual life was temporarily forgotten. Then came a wrestle between ancient habit and the invader; the flying forces of constitutional caution were rallied and the diseased mind made a stand. Gwendolen called to her side the one woman with knowledge and affection enough to protect her natural from her delirious self. She had no desire to wreck the peace of others by that indulgence in confession so dear to those about to sail into the wide waters of a new existence. She had held her secret too long and at too great a price to sac-

rifice it now, and she called to Minnie, for the second

time, to stand between herself and betrayal.

True, her husband could no longer bring his cold eye to bear upon her weakness, but there was Anthony, who came at intervals to make inquiries, to regard her with that horrible air of controlled interest as void of natural affection as of trust. Well enough she understood, that, like his father, he suspected her of secretions, though, unlike old Glover, he could detach the suspicion from indignation. She could almost fancy him grateful to her for that veil of elusiveness, in which, from time immemorial, she had wrapped herself. The density of the folds provided his disposition with the food of its choice.

For herself, the petty lines of personal dignity no longer mattered; but for her child—the child she had sent so far from her, they mattered much; and she struggled to preserve them, as despotically as she had once striven to separate cause and effect in her dealings with George Southern.

She smiled a glad and grateful smile at the old friend who came so promptly. It was a luxury to feel again the touch of one who loved without question. For Gwenny's heart, in spite of all its reserve, was sentient still; she was tragically conscious of her own state of isolation and of the harsh quality of the gifts the years had settled on her. There was no agnosticism in the mind that analyzed them so pitilessly, but there was scarcely philosophy enough, either, to protect the emotions.

She could not doubt the superiority of mind over matter; she never suspected treachery in those spirit unions, which were all that life left her in the way of luxury, but, as she grew older, as she read, more and more attentively, of the soul-journeys of others, there came to her, gradually and painfully, the conviction that the absorbing and intoxicating dreams of youth are never allowed to substantiate. For a long time the figure of her lost boy-lover stood in the center of that vast and shapeless world, created half by her powers of romance, half by her primitive religious beliefs. For years she had lived fantastically, and not quite un-

happily, in spiritual connection with those from whom fortune had divided her, and it was only by very slow degrees that she permitted herself to be despoiled of these precious companions of the imagination.

Now, as she lay at the mercy of fever and pain and weakness, the sums of these accumulated scraps of intro-

spection became very uncompromising in character.

It was not George Southern and all that he stood for of youth and joy, towards whom she drifted out in patient resignation; it was not the idolized grandmother who beckoned; it was the force from which this man and woman had been evoked that drew her, feeble, but trustful, back into its mysterious essence. George was no longer the spirit of the morning, calling beneath her window, cutting, for her, a way into the heart of free forest life; she was no longer the girl who had looked at him with eyes, now hungry, now treacherous; the girl who had flown to him with impious passion and from him with fanatical fervor. Boy and girl—man and woman—they had asked of one another when they should have asked of the parent power from which they sprang.

She would shed with her body that mute and agonizing cry for her friend. It came with the fever, but it was mechanical; it meant no more than the muscular movement that often inspires a human form from which the spirit has departed. It was only the fever that rewoke that haunting story of the past—that sent his name so perpetually to her lips. Her saner self, fluttering home, at intervals, with pain and effort, would tell a braver—a longer story than the one to which, in youth, she had been a

victim.

She would touch those lips and hands no more; not because denial frowned before, as well as behind her, but because there were better things to touch in that dim future gathering about the bed.

And the coming of Minnie brought her infinite comfort and reassurance. She saw in Minnie the wise woman, to whom all the secrets of nature have been revealed, not in book-language, but in the language of sympathy. Minnie asked no questions, and, what was more, she suppressed none. An inner instinct made clear to her the needs of those she served, and her simplicity was like a breath of fresh air in a room long closed. The ministration of her deft hands was mentally as well as physically soothing.

For the greater part of the day of her arrival, the patient showed signs of improvement, and until late in the afternoon she kept a satisfactory control of her faculties, but towards evening the fever returned, and, presently, other symptoms of unfavorable portent put in an appearance. A consultation had been held that same morning, at the instigation of the family doctor, a great light from town presiding; but the conclusion unanimously arrived at was disheartening, from all points of view. The case was one of those innately disturbing to science. With their fees in their pockets and the spirit of repulse in their hearts, the great men went back to fight less independent, less desperate causes.

Doctor Forde, who had presided over the family ailments for twenty years, listened sadly to Minnie's appeal, yielded to it, as a man yields to circumstances that his honesty has to acknowledge too strong for his skill. The hospital nurse, who had been summoned the day previous, was, obviously, uncongenial to the delicate perceptions of the patient on whose courage all depended. What Minnie lacked in technical knowledge of nursing she atoned for by an almost uncanny instinct concerning the mental state of her charge. She was soft-footed too, and soft-handed; she never rattled the medicine-bottles and glasses, and she let the drops fall with a hand entirely steady. With but little argument the old woman got her way. It was decided that the professional nurse should enjoy a sound night's sleep, while the amateur, in spite of her day's service, was to be allowed to remain at her post, at least until the doctor's return at dawn, and, having satisfied himself that Minnie had her table of directions at her finger-tips, he took his departure.

For an hour or two Gwendolen lay very still. Her pulse was quieter, the fever had dropped; at intervals she muttered, but only a word or two at a time. Once or twice she started violently, but when her nurse leant over her she

smiled in recognition and relief.

"I thought it was Anthony in the room," she said on two occasions. He had been to visit her in the morning, but since the verdict of the doctors he had kept away, and Minnie hoped he would continue to do so. It was plain that he was a source of fear to the sick woman. At his entrance she had always seemed to rouse herself by sheer force of will into consciousness. Carefully she had listened to his questions and warily she had answered them, and when he left the room her eyes had always followed his departing form with what Minnie recognized as intense satisfaction.

But, by-and-by, the little palace of hope she was erecting upon the silence, shook and fell. Gwendolen began to toss feebly on her pillows; the odd words swelled into a stream, and soon the racking spirits of delirium were out again, driving the quarry down the old track, back to the gray house upon the hill—the house that had laid its spell for once and for always upon the heart of the little adventuress, and charged it with so dangerous and illogical an ardor of appreciation.

These rapid utterances were united by little law of sequence, but they were always attached to that single chain

of experience in this history of the past.

"You've such a cold, thin face!" the voice declared more than once. "It's like a hatchet, and your eyes are the keen blade. How it glitters! You're very wise, aren't you? for you sit all day and every day gathering the wisdom of the dead men. I want to learn it too; I must learn it. Pull the blind down, Mr. Calder, or he'll see me and call to me through the window, and then when he calls I have to go. We go deep down into the woods together; so deep that there isn't any sunshine, and the scent of the trees is like the scent of a vault where the dead people lie.

I'm always thinking of those dead people and how soundly they sleep, for death is only sleep—I've found that out; they smile sometimes out of their shrouds—such a smile! so strange and chill and fearful. Why do you stare at me? I'm only a little girl; I won't be anything else—do you hear? You want to make me wise as yourself, but not to-day, not to-day, Mr. Calder; to-day's a holiday. I'm going to run away—from you—from everybody—but him."

Minnie stooped and laid a cool hand on her forehead,

smoothing out the furrows in it.

"I'd nearly forgotten you," she said, in another and a happier voice. "I'm glad you called me. I like to be with you. You're so kind and safe; you're so fat and happy. And you rustle so, like the leaves in the autumn. It's your funny silk gown, isn't it? I'll sit here, up on the dresser, and watch you at work. What lovely work! What thousands of petals, red and pink and white—and oh, what a lovely smell! It goes on for ever and ever, like the story of this house; what a long time! But now I'm frightened again. I mustn't stay—I don't belong—I must go back into the darkness, into the picture—into father's picture, that he looks at with half-shut eyes, like the painters do. He's looking at me now, and it's a knife in me."

"Hush, Miss Gwenny. There's no pictures here, nor

painters neither."

"That's Minnie," said the sick woman gratefully. "You always come when I call, don't you? You're always in the curtains, though I can't see you. And now I can't hear you any more. This is the hour that I dread; this is the hour when you have to go away to your supper," she added, with a fall of spirit, "and they'll come back to frighten me."

"No. I shan't go away, deary, though there's none to

frighten you in this house."

"Are you quite sure, Minnie?"

"Quite, quite sure, Miss Gwenny."

There was a silence, then the voice again, shrill and fearful.

"It's the mouse, Minnie! oh, you promised me it couldn't get in, but it can! It's scampering round in my head. How did it get in? and how will it ever get out again? Drive it away, Minnie. It's hurting me."

"It's gone," said the woman placidly. "They're a regular pest are the mice in these old houses, but they never hurt nobody. I thought you liked the mice, Miss Gwenny; you

wouldn't never let me set traps for them."

"It hasn't gone; it's gnawing a way in and I can't stop it. Nobody can stop it when once it has begun. What a dreadful thought! It's like the seed in the earth; it lies so still, so silent, until everybody has forgotten it, and then it begins to grow; it's growing now, bigger and bigger, and nobody knows, nobody guesses; nobody will ever come to me except the death-man. Minnie, Minnie, be quick! oh, be quick, dear! or he'll take me before you come."

"Why, you're dreaming, Miss Gwenny. I came long ago."

Gwendolen let herself be momentarily reassured, and

closed her bright, staring eyes.

Minnie mixed a draught and coaxed her to swallow it.

"Go to sleep, deary. I won't go away."

For a time the patient lay motionless, then a shadow fell suddenly across the bed, across the flushed face, and Minnie started violently. She had heard no footfall, but some one had entered the room. Some one must be standing behind her, and, turning, she found herself face to face with the person she least wished to see in this chamber of sickness.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A LOST NAME

"You shouldn't be here, sir. She's excited enough as it is. I've just given her a sleeping-draught, and I'm hopeful it will send her off. Go away, Mr. Glover. I'll let you know the moment there's a change, whether for better or worse."

He made no reply; he stood looking down attentively at the form upon the bed. The eyes were open again, and full of the fire of delirium. The cheek was rosy with fever, the calm face was alive with strange and unfamiliar passions, and the youth regarded it with growing appreciation.

To the woman's second and more urgent appeal he turned a deaf ear, and it was evident he saw in the occasion a

value he meant to stop and decipher.

He moved noiselessly to the other side of the bed, and, seating himself on the edge of it, he proceeded to scrutinize its occupant carefully. She was, apparently, unaware of his presence. It was into the far distance she stared so wistfully.

"She hasn't slept for so long, sir, and it's sleep, and only

sleep, that can bring her healing."

"I'm not disturbing her, my good soul," he said equably, but at the sound of his voice so close to her ear, Gwendolen broke out once more.

"I can't be mistaken. I've counted them so often. There were thirty-two windows in front, and fifteen on the side nearest the orchard, and seventeen—now, was it seventeen at the back? I wish I could remember. I'm sure of nothing to-night."

The stream was flowing, but more inconsequently than

before. Names emerged, but it almost seemed that the eavesdropper was to be disappointed, for the ideas ran in circles, coming from nowhere, going nowhere save into the land of nonsense. She was a child again, or rather the creature, part child, part woman, to whom the soul's awakening had come prematurely.

He evinced no sign of impatience, but after a while he leant forward and put his long, cool fingers to her fore-

head.

She cried out, and brought her own hands up from the coverlet, at which they had been picking restlessly. She pressed them closely on to those venturing fingers, as though she strove to prison something precious. Her eyes closed, but not in languor, rather with the air of one who desires to protect herself from the sights fatal to illusion.

"How did you come?" she whispered. "Why did you come, George? But no, you mustn't speak. Somebody

will hear and send you away."

She drew his hand lower, till it reached her mouth, and over the remainder of the face left exposed, lay a startling expression of ecstasy. For some minutes the sight of it appeared to satisfy the young man's demand for sensation, and, for those same few minutes, he actually appeared to Minnie in the guise of an angel of healing.

Let her beloved charge call him "George," or any other incorrect name her wandering fancy might select, so long as the mistake offered her the invaluable gift of mental

relief.

But her satisfaction was of short duration. All too soon she became aware that the imprisoned hand was vibrant. She felt, rather than saw, its scarcely perceptible movement, but she saw, very plainly, the quick and terrible response of the delicate nerves it strove thus secretly and subtly to influence.

The rapture on the worn face was changing to a look of mingled fear and question. The hands slipped down until they lay upon the neck and the fluttering pulse in it, while the free mouth began again its tale of ancient conflict. "I told you not to speak. I begged you not to speak. If we're silent maybe they won't notice us; maybe they'll leave us alone. Oh, be still, only be still!"

But the hand was not still, and, in reply to its slight but momentous motion, she grew restless. She turned her head

from her tormentor, and back again.

When her ear lay directly beneath his mouth, he began to whisper. Minnie could catch but few of the words, but she could watch the effect they made; she could trace the cruelty and the determination in them by the track they fur-

rowed across the wan face she loved so devotedly.

Those long fingers sought the inflamed nerves with intent the opposite of soporific. Now she knew them for the spur, as nearly invisible as might be, that pricked the inflamed mind towards utterance, towards revelation, towards the secret that had so long tantalized his ingenuity. But she knew, also, that she was powerless. This cruelty could be observable to none save herself. Gwendolen clung feverishly to the instigating hand; she drank thirstily the notes of that whispering voice. Anthony's attitude was fully protected by the very laws he secretly outraged. To interfere was only further to increase this dangerous atmosphere of excitement, to lay oneself open to condemnation.

It was plain that many of the phrases stumbling from the mother's lip, came at the instigation of the son, and they went fatally near the point of betrayal for which he aimed so pitilessly. His whisper kept her always in the gray house, always in touch, in nervous touch, with its inmates. Unquestioningly she accepted the voice as that of the lover of her youth, though ever, under the accent of delight, lurked the suspicion that mars the glory of a dream.

"Why did I marry him? George—you married and I understood. Have you come back to hurt me? I've been

hurt enough."

She turned from him to the other side of the bed, and, promptly, the old woman seized her opportunity and bent to whisper in her turn.

"Go to sleep, Miss Gwenny. There's none to hurt you here. There's only Minnie sitting beside you till you go off."

"Only you, Minnie? Was I frightened of you? No, now I remember. It was the ghosts. Why do they hate me so?"

"There aren't no ghosts here, deary, nor anywhere, for the matter of that. It's only children that believe in ghosts."

"I feel so little in this house," the poor thing murmured, "a child again. I want to be a child. It's good to be so small and foolish. Sing to me, Minnie—the song I liked

the best. You'll remember, though I can't."

Her eyelids fell, as she listened to the soft, crooning sound, and the look of recovered peace hung, for a moment, over her, then, the hand, still at her throat, stirred again, and all the wires of her sensitive being began to throb an answer. Her head went back to the other side; her ear lay, once more, beneath the whispering mouth, and Minnie could only lean back in her place, and pray, with all the fervor her religious faith and her desperation could produce between them.

After all, she told herself, by way of stimulant, the secret was safe enough in these hands. Pride and self-interest would curb the man's tongue, and revelation could only serve as a double barrier between him and his half-sister.

It was only her mistress' comfort and honor she wished to secure. She wanted to close those dear eyes with the unimpaired stamp of personal dignity upon them. She wanted to deny to every mourning glance, even the suggestion of a right to criticize.

And it almost seemed as though those silent prayers, going up to heaven between mundane thoughts and calculations, were to find an answer, though it was not the one demanded; for Gwendolen was chattering again of her chilhood. Minnie must have invoked a strain of light and happy memories, for, at intervals, she laughed, weak but convincing laughter. She was back in the old house, but

she was playing, like a kitten, with its gravity and its old-world air of dignity. Now it was the librarian at whom she jested and mocked; now it was the plump housekeeper, and now Sir George himself. She was the innocent pet of the household, wielding her power with dainty pretense of cruelty.

And Minnie understood, that, to the man who listened, there was discomfort in the tale. He had never been young; he had never been innocent; all that he had missed or derided in his scheme of existence flaunted its divinity before him. Sending covert glances into his calm face, she knew that it was in sullen wrath and impotent pain that he

looked on at this ebullition of gaiety.

This laughing, loving girl, with her warm hands outstretched to give or take, could not fail to touch the weak point in his code of legislature; and, while the exhibition brought righteous punishment to profanity, it brought, also, to the mind of the devoted servant, an appreciation of the ways of justice. To have paid in full the exigeant demands of nature seemed to her, in this illuminating moment, an achievement that no court of human condemnation had the power to condemn. She saw the virgin charm of this creature of her devotion pass out from the temporary cloud that had obscured its brightness, and, with a look of triumph, she sent her first bold glance into the face of the enemy.

He received it with a baleful smile, then bent a little

closer over his victim.

"Gwenny, come back to me. I want you. I always want you, don't I? But I want the woman who loved me,

Gwenny, not the child who laughed at me."

"I never laughed at you, George. At all the rest, but never at you. I'm coming, dear. I always come when you call, though it isn't wise; it's only very wonderful. When I touch your hand there comes a mist over everything; the mist that lay around the little ruined tower, the mist that hung about the river in the morning, making the common things so beautiful and strange. Oh, George, they're

far too beautiful for me! I don't belong. I must go back to the green tables and the noise and the horrible thoughts. I must go back into the picture and be sold! I told you to go away. I begged you to go away. It isn't safe here."

Once more she turned from him, and found her nurse's

fingers.

"It's only me, Miss Gwenny."

"There was some one else," said the dying woman fretfully. "He's gone; I sent him away; but I want him, Minnie, I want him"; and she turned back, seeking the voice of the charmer.

And now he dropped his tone again, sending the question into her ear alone—the question she would not be able to evade; the question that his ingenuity told him would produce, at last, the answer to the long riddle of her melancholy life.

She trembled as he put it, torn by memories and bewilder-

ment.

"Why must I tell you? I told you long ago. Have you forgotten? There was the play-room. I came so softly past your door, but not so softly-oh, God forgive me!-as I might have come. You followed me; I can hear your steps, up and up, through the still house, through the great bedchamber with the strange smell of long ago-the room into which the children came and out of which the mothers went; and up and on, by the staircase with the winding, crooked steps, to the play-room under the roof. Oh! I can feel the cold; it's the very middle of the night; there's your gun against the wall; it looks like a phantom with that blue light on the barrel; I'd like to press it against my heart and slip out into the undiscovered country-but no; you wouldn't be there, and I couldn't live so far from you. There's a sound; is it a mouse? Is it my heart or yours? How it beats! Oh, I'm frightened! I want the morning with the good sunlight. The moon is a witch; she's weaving a spell now, a spell of evil. I can't see her, but she's there, hiding behind the clouds. Don't move, don't speak. You're to stay on your side of the window. This room is

full of people, George. I can hear them. They're telling me such awful things, all the things in heaven above and in the earth beneath and in the water-oh! I can't remember about the water, but it isn't safe. We must go back softly as we came, through the grim bedroom, through the sleeping house, back to the old horrible life. You're not to touch me, but you're to talk at once of anything, of nothingquick! or it will be too late; -- of the nest we found yesterday—there were birds in it; of your gun—no, that's death and pain. Oh, when will the sun come? Is it going to be night for ever? and why won't you speak? Is that your hand? It's warm and everything else is so cold. You must take it away. I'm afraid of it. What's that? There's some one tapping at the window; it's only the roses, the June roses; it's late for them—too late—too late for everything, for here's your warm hand again-no, it's your arms; they're coming round me and I can't keep them off. Your face is coming out of the darkness. I can see the eyes looking down for mine, and now I'm not frightened any more. The others have all gone; there's only you and me-only you and me in all the world to matter."

Gasping, she broke off, and Minnie made a last effort to

turn the stream of memory.

"Miss Gwenny!" she called shrilly, "I want you."

"You mustn't come here, Minnie. Nobody must come here. It's holy ground, for it was here I took him, Minnie, for life or death, for good or evil. There's only you, George, in all the world. It's you I lived for and lied for and suffered for; it's you who sleep upon my heart every night of the endless years. They tried to take you away; they put you under-ground, but you never stay there. Oh, it's good to hold you so tight!"

But as she paused he caressed her, and whispered once again, and obediently her spirit moved on into more troubled

waters.

"I can't remember; that's what I can't remember. But I told you in the letter, dearest, the letter that went into the fire. Oh, why will you hurt me so? The name—the name?

It's gone—but I gave it you; you couldn't lose it—the name of your own child—such a pretty name, and now I want it—I must have it. Find it me; I gave it you and you've lost it. Minnie knows, but I sent her away; I sent everybody away but you; and now you won't tell me the name."

"The name?" he echoed, and looked compellingly at the

woman opposite.

But it was her turn to show repulse. Her lips were set close, and her small bright eyes gleamed out upon him with mute defiance and disdain.

"Be quiet, Gwenny," he said soothingly; "be quiet and

you'll remember."

"Oh, she was so little, George, and so fair, and fate took her away in the pink cot with all the soft pillows; she used to burrow her face into them. Emmy's child slipped out and she slipped in, and I want the name—the name," she finished wildly.

And on a flash of comprehension he found, and involuntarily he gave it her. "Alva," he gasped; and "Alva," she

repeated, with a sob of relief.

She fell back, freed at last, for in the moment of revelation his hand dropped, and he made no effort to replace it. For some seconds he sat staring before him with horrified unseeing eyes, then he shivered slightly, and rose from his seat on the bed.

Minnie glanced cautiously at him, as she slipped into his vacated place, and saw there was no more to be feared from him. He had enough food for digestion, something more than enough, and he slunk back into the shadows behind the bed, thinking his startled thoughts.

"Alva," said the sick woman softly, imploringly, "where

is she?"

"Safe, deary; well and happy. She's got all you wouldn't take, Miss Gwenny: the name and the house, and the good, true man that loves her; and he knows the whole story, for I told him, and he only loves her the more because of it. That's the way with the Southerns, as you know; they always set their gates open to trouble. She's

safe, and it's God's answer to all them tears of yours, and

it's a beautiful answer, to my thinking."

"Yes, and it's always you, Minnie, who find these beautiful things. I'm glad to have you near me. You're always in the curtains, waiting, in case I call. How tired I am! I'd like to sleep. Put your head on the pillow beside me, then I can be certain you haven't slipped away. My head is quite steady now, and I can see you plainly. They all think you're just an old servant, but you're something very different. I think it's one of those old churches in Wales; they haven't much ornament, and what they have is generally broken; but you go in, perhaps only out of curiosity, and in the doorway a spirit meets you, and says—and says: 'I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; I am in the great cathedrals of the earth; I am in the hearts of beggars—I am everywhere; I am here. I am the spirit of love and sacrifice. I go from the cross to the crown.'"

"You were always full of fancies, Miss Gwenny. You used to turn the sticks and stones into fairies, so if you like to turn me into a little Welsh church, I've no objection. Anyway, you're right to think I care a deal more for you and Miss Alva than for my stupid old self, and you're right to put a cross on my back; but as for the crown, I'd rather have the polishing of it than the wearing of it, by a long way, and I don't doubt the Lord Almighty 'Il bear that in mind, when my time comes to go elsewhere. Now shut your eyes, while I croon to you, and maybe you'll

drop off."

But Gwendolen was laughing weakly.

"Oh, Minnie! you really are the first and the last. Why did I go so far afield? Why did I bother with George Southern and his palace of stone? The real fairy palace was so much nearer. I see it now, and it's mine—it always was mine, and the other was only—only—I can't find the word. I'm so tired—so dreadfully tired!"

"Don't you worry, deary. Perhaps the palace you didn't ought to have had showed you the way to the one you've

chanced on now."

"That's a good thought to sleep on," said her mistress, and, as if in gratitude to it, her lids fell. By slow degrees the passion and the pain passed out of the pale face. Sleep, the healer, came too late to knit the physical forces into healthy motion again, but not too late to smooth the path for the out-going soul.

For nearly an hour the old woman watched the slight rise and fall of the breast, of the eyelids. Scarcely knowing the direction in which went her own hopes and fears, she waited for the final resignation of faculty, for that divorce her sub-conscious self knew to be desirable, as well as irrevocable. She could not fail to note that every breath lost a little of its vigor; softer, shorter, each followed each, and the last ended in a sigh.

So intense was the stillness of the room, that it was borne to other ears than Minnie's. The man behind the curtains, sunk in savage reverie, heard and stirred to the ominous sound of it.

But if he meant to lay a possessive hand or an inquiring finger on the dead woman, she was too quick for him. She rose to her feet beside the bed, shielding the body from his glance, and she laid her hand over the sightless eyes, pressing the lids closely down on them.

Boldly she turned to look at him, to defy him, almost to taunt him.

"Yes, she's dead, Mr. Anthony. There's no more for her to tell you. Go to your own place, sir, for—it isn't here!"

Utterly unmanned by an animosity so unexpected, evolved, too, out of matter so inconsequent, he found himself without retort, and with a movement of the shoulders, too uncertain and ineffective to express his favorite shrug, he wheeled about and slunk from the chamber.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WAY ALL THE STRAWS WERE BLOWING

What had she meant, that distraught woman, standing between him and her dead? What had inspired the gentle tongue into that all too suggestive mode of dismissal? To what place did he belong?

In the privacy of his own room these questions approached him pitilessly, and he had already the alarming suspicion that they were going to prove too many for him.

He looked at the hundreds of books lining his walls, and his impulse was that of an ill-bred dog,—viz., to turn on the hand that had fed him, regardless of the fact that it had done so at his own insistent demand. At every tutor, living and dead, he hurled mute invective, conscious that every curse would come home to roost before very long.

His despair had a central point, but he was incapable, as yet, of facing it. He made tortuous journeys into labyrinths of side issues, feeling a nervous way towards the heart of the matter, the heart that, with colossal profanity,

he had excluded from his scheme of existence.

Holding the thought of Alva steadily at bay, he mused upon the secret as connected with the fates of his parents. He speculated on the amount of knowledge with which his father had taken this mysterious woman to wife, and he felt certain that she had confessed from the very first, tacitly, not openly, her excommunication from common rights.

As far back as he could remember, she had always worn that look of uncomplaining endurance, and her husband had, undoubtedly, elected to take his satisfaction from it, rather than from the utterance of a name. Anthony could appreciate this choice, just as the cat can appreciate the ineffectual struggles of the mouse between her paws. Gwendolen had been allowed to keep the husk of her secret, while the soul of it fluttered about the grim house, a horrible and shapeless bond between the two—tormentor and tormented.

He could recall the malignant air of enjoyment in his father's face, as he put, upon occasion, some innocent sounding query concerning the Southern family. He told himself that for his own part he had always been content to link her imagination—a child's imagination, too—with this name; and following a suddenly evolved point of defense, he tried to prove a species of treachery towards himself, in the revelation of the night—tried to brow-beat the conscience he had so long denied, into silence, by the extenuating declaration that his one solitary tower of faith had been erected upon the innate purity of this stranger mother of his.

Rendered a trifle bolder by this claim to a personal grievance, he called himself the victim of the laws of heredity. What chance had he been given, fathered by a person of Glover's type, mothered by a woman whose every breedingthought must have been stained by defiance of the law?

And now he found courage to approach, warily, that dangerous inner kernel to the occasion. He reminded himself that, being void of sentiment, despoliation could only affect him in the minor degree. He carried imagination to the mouth of the grave, and set it listening to the rattle of earth upon a coffin-lid; but the coffin did not hold the body of his genuine interest, and, with an effort, he withdrew the dummy, and set the real cause of his perturbation face to face with analysis.

"A sister." The word seared his pride, threatening, as it

did, the sole god of his devotion-distinction.

His pulse had quickened to a mock stimulatress. Alva had been a will-of-the-wisp, and he the common traveler, lured into the ignominy of a morass by his own ridiculous credulity. Or again, she had been the mirror, and he the pretty boy of legend, enamored of his own image.

Alva! Fiercely he called her one of the many straws

before the wind of his powerful and unique temperament, but, in the end, the simile only forced his intelligence a little nearer to the pit of despair.

From whence did the wind come? Whither was it going? He shivered as he looked forward and back, like a man trapped between two inhuman and irresistible monsters.

Where did he come from? Out of what realms of independent feeling? out of what empty places? out of what bleak womb of sensation?

As a baby he could remember holding back the common cry of nature, lest it should evoke the common and disdained form of condolence. Repression had been the favorite sugar-plum, long before he could gauge the quality of the sugar on it. With him it had been an instinct to endure, to misname, to circumvent, to defy; to worst authority in any and every shape; to go down, time after time, under the cuffs of circumstance, and come up with all the indifference he could assume. And, for a second hobby, he had tested and succumbed to all the meaner forms of power; he could recall the royal edict of annihilation pronounced over the beetle, and the riper forms of this abominable tendency, by which, under the sheltering name of "sport," he had hounded creatures innumerable out of their all too brief share of existence.

Peer as sharply as he could into the gloom behind, it was to find nothing but death, reproach, and cruelty. No single friend stretched him a hand, for he had offered his to none.

He had achieved nothing, save epigrams, whose increasing paucity of meaning had reduced life to a nutshell. He had nothing to show for it. He had babbled complacently of a row of pictures, but the figures in them, even that of the lurid dancing-girl, were artificial. They all moved in the fashion of an expensively constructed toy, and he had been compelled to look that night upon the movements of a living, pulsing woman. It was impossible to ignore any longer the line of division. His toys must go, as he had told Alva that hers must, but—what was to replace them?

That journey with her into the four corners of the globe, which he had promised himself should do duty for what the fanciful call an escape into the infinite, was forbidden, and what was left to him?

He could still destroy, but there was a limit, he began to fear, to destructible matter.

He had skirted the natural order persistently, remorselessly, and now the friend he had chosen to call an enemy having been obliged to retreat, step by step, he found himself upon the ground of his desire; and it was barren ground, and he—an emperor of negation.

Faintly there came to him the cry of those he had broken upon the wheel of his inability to combine pleasure and profit, but the cry was not to his pity or his power. He was only the breaker, and they were calling, in their many-

noted voices, for the mender.

He began to lose even his affectation of calm. He began to rage against this sense of impotence. He cursed the old man downstairs and the disease with which he had been inoculated. The paralysis had seized his father's body, but it had its tentacles in his mind. Struggling to free himself from the deadly embrace of this conviction, he arraigned before him a row of lighter questions.

How did the discovery affect his actual, social position? Was his comfort touched or his influence reduced? Suppose his world enlightened, would it turn its shoulder? Here, at least, he found a point of reassurance, for it was certain that society would show no open hostility. It would stare a little, like the ill-mannered child it was; it would whisper and nudge the elbows of its neighbor with suppressed intelligence, but it would never budge an inch from its position of effusive cordiality. That much was certain. He was not sure that, the cradle being legitimate, it would not find in his position an element of the grotesque, calculated to enhance the original value.

Wine, wife, and song were, therefore, left untouched. What could he make of that trio of sirens? The first catered to weakness of the head; the second to weakness

of the heart; the third to weakness of the imagination. With an impatient gesture he consigned them all three to the limbo of exhausted emotions. He craved for that which should cater to faculty, not to the lack of it.

There were the professions. It was not too late to master one of them. Other men rode such hacks to the death, but then other men had not drunk the cup of mental sensation down to its sour dregs. They had not forced the ignorance, designed to assuage the pang of life, out of its natural place. For them the coat of many colors had still its attraction. They saw no dirty linen beneath the trim uniform; no toy sword in the fine scabbard; no "asses' ears beneath the reverent purple." They had been content to accept the show at its vaunted valuation; they had been content to spin out the game to its threescore-and-ten conclusion.

It was too late to go with them; he had denounced their route and their taste so unequivocably.

He had presumed to disdain, and now, in his turn, he stood disdained—outlawed. He saw himself, like some sun of desperation, round which the cheerful system of daily life revolved in utter indifference.

He could not lift his scared eyes to the hills, for, long ago, those hills had been reduced to a dead level. No ideal called; no sweet secreted hope whispered; he could and he must fall, but not to his knees, for he was of one piece throughout. No knife, however subtly wielded, could sever the sound from the unsound.

He looked at Alva, and saw in her the sum total of his remaining interest in life. And Alva, the one remaining woman with power and will to magnetize him into action, was no more than "sister" to him—echo of him. Thus did fortune translate the single mystery left upon his stage.

Alva gone, the secret of his house gone, even his self-

control rocking-what was there to linger for?

And now he faced squarely the problem of the night, the problem that had actually frightened him into temporizing with his own faculties of analysis. From the first moment when he had found and given his mother the fatal name of the lost child, he had known the doom upon his heels. He had known it and he had winced from it. So far was he bound by the vulgar law, but no farther. His education should, at least, teach him to do neatly and with dignity what was usually accomplished only with an exuberance of emotion.

If it had been something of a shock to his vanity to discover he was not quite so bloodless as he had fancied, it was a relief to find his muscles and nerves answering so promptly to the rallying voice. Coolly he regarded the door of exit, telling himself that if it had been made use of by all the rank and file of the incompetent and unbalanced, it had not been taken in his fashion. He fled before no woman and no earthly law. It was not pressure, but the lack of pressure, that drove him through, and, with recovered mastery of body and mind, he made his few preparations.

But, as he seated himself in his comfortable chair before the hearth, as he fingered the derringer he had loaded so neatly, and felt the chill of its metal frame against his warm and steady fingers, he felt, besides, a thrill of unexpected movement in his breast. Something stirred where all had been frozen. A little stream of unsuspected life started from some source he failed to locate, and hurried forward, in the wake of his purpose; but, like a curious crowd following the promise of adventure, this novel sensation, instead of hampering him, served to inspire his self-appreciation. It was as though he operated on a more vital organ than he had anticipated.

For a second or so his mind was big with complacency. But not thus easily and blindly was he to pass the dark portal. Just as the fatal impulse started, there sprang suddenly before his reluctant mind the image of a cross. Vainly he strove to twist his writhing lips into a superior smile; vainly he called up the recollections, the convictions of a lifetime; vainly he termed the rude emblem of sacrifice

an exploded theory—a sentimental relic; denunciation shriveled and shrank, as a ghost before the dawn, and it was with the "Lord, remember me" of the confessed thief, that he went out to meet the fate he had so glibly challenged.

CHAPTER XXX

A QUESTION OF FIFTY POUNDS

GRISELDA sat in the sunny bow-window of her boudon while a summer wind gamboled in the garden below. Soft gusts of it slipped through the pane she had set ajar, to shake the curtains of Indian muslin or to trifle with the flowers in the glass bowl upon the sill.

The sun, with the help of the glass and the water in it, threw bars of violet and rose and yellow on the white frock of the baby in her lap, and he struggled to catch the dazzling toy in the ineffectual fashion common to a few

months' acquaintance with life.

His mother had plenty of foolish ideas to exchange with him.

"Butter-fingers!" she would exclaim, when a specially ill-judged effort had failed of its purpose. "Now you have him; hold tight," she would add a little later; "we'll undo one finger ever so carefully, and peep in." But, lo! the radiant prisoner had disappeared, and the child would stare from his empty pink palm to the mock-astonished face above him, and frown his inability to cope with the inconsistencies of life.

It was an engrossing pastime to examine the varied possibilities concealed in this new and living plaything. In a hundred ways she tested the embryo mind, hunting tirelessly for a key to its mechanism, chancing now upon a layer of prose, now upon a dainty bud of a fancy, now upon a tendency so familiar as to be startling.

Little Harry bore a strong (the indifferent might perhaps have called it a grotesque) likeness to his sire, and it pleased Griselda to launch at the son many of the adventurous assertions she had never dared to offer to the father.

"I'm a fraud," she would say at times, and it was oddly comforting to have the confession treated with levity.

"I've deceived you over and over again," she would add, and this effigy of a judge would offer her absolution in the

form of a series of ecstatic chuckles.

"It's no laughing matter," she would occasionally persist, with an undercurrent of gravity in her voice. "You're forgetting yourself; try and remember that you've a strong bias towards law and order."

But the baby would jovially insist that the only bias he recognized was towards the carpet, and he would fling himself backwards with a violence of enthusiasm that it required considerable physical strength to cope with success-

Sometimes she shook him, but in too cajoling a manner

to rouse his indignation.

"To be so close," she would whisper, "and to see nothing!

Dear, blind boy, it isn't fair or kind or safe."

But the incorrigible infant would insist that it was, at least, intensely funny, and he would gurgle his complete contempt for that same undercurrent of emotion she sought

to set flowing in a portentous direction.

"You might have told him," she would complain, when the near approach of sleep made him less exacting as to her expression. "You promised to tell him; it's partly what you were sent for. I've done a lot for you, but you won't do anything for me. You're like the man who 'eats well and sleeps well, but, put a bit of work before him, and he's all of a dither."

This was of course a joke, and little Harry usually roused himself up to laugh at it, while she laughed with

him, though a trifle ruefully.

Occasionally his acumen scented her lack of enthusiasm. He would emit a warning grunt, as he stared suspiciously into her troubled face, and it was advisable to offer him the tip of a finger to bite, by way of reassurance.
"I'm a stranger to you," she would go on, when his

lashes fell once more on to his pink cheeks, "and some day

the cloud will burst, and we haven't got an umbrella between us. It will be rain all day and rain every day, and you won't find things quite so pleasant, Harry Dorset, junior. Your comforts will go to the wall, for I shan't have the heart to play with you." But again he would grunt, this time a refusal to be imbued with the pessimistic spirit, and, remorsefully, she would cuddle him close.

Courage usually came to her as the tiny creature drifted out from all consciousness of her tender hold and murmuring voice. Her pulse would flutter the invigorating tale of great achievement.

She was prepared to fold her hands in penitence or appeal; but instinctively she felt that such an attitude would be the voluntary submission of one conscious force to another. She felt her own justification, though as yet she could not have expressed it, and it was generally to a cradle of optimistic feeling that she dismissed her troop of painful memories. On this particular morning of sunshine the baby slept early, and when Joanna appeared to carry away her unexacting burden, Griselda was more loth than usual to let him go.

Joanna had been installed as nurse for nearly a month, and her pride in the position was not yet staled by custom. The baby approved her round and rosy face just a little more ostentatiously than his mother liked. She was too sensible, however, to let this pin-prick of jealousy influence her realization of Joanna's value. The girl could discriminate, with almost uncanny ease, between the meaning of a "goo" and a "gaa," and she could circumvent a scream, at the very moment of emission, by means of some weird noise of her own, infinitely less disturbing to the nerves of the household.

She took the child now without rousing anything worse than a faint whimper of warning, and carried him away, while Griselda spread her stiff arms out and up, trying to pretend that it was a relief to feel them empty.

For a minute or two she sat in luxurious idleness, letting

the sunshine play over her, then she turned her head, aware that the nurse had returned.

"Forgotten something?" she inquired carelessly; but Joanna made no answer. She stood in the doorway, plainly uncertain how to produce her subject.

"Don't tell me you're going to be married and leave baby," her mistress exclaimed, alarmed at this unusual air

of reticence.

"I'm sure I don't want to go, ma'am, not yet awhile. I'm in no 'urry. And Warren isn't neither, if only well could be let alone."

"Warren?" said Griselda; and at the mention of that name a flock of troubled memories surged into her mind.

- "Yes, mum. 'E's got 'is notice—this day month, and no reason given—just 'you don't suit'; that's what's put 'is back up, ma'am. But the master never 'as taken to Jim from the first. It was only to please you as 'e agreed to give 'im a trial."
 - "I can't interfere again, Joanna; understand that."

"Yes, ma'am, we're not asking you to."

"Then what are you asking for?" Griselda inquired.

"Well, ma'am. It's not easy to say. It's all beyond me, the letter and the money and all; but Jim won't listen, and nothing 'll serve 'im but I'm to speak to you."

"Letter? Money? Whatever are you talking about?"

"You may well ask, ma'am. The letter's one as Warren picked up."

She paused, distinctly embarrassed.

- "Yes?" said Griselda, politely but not encouragingly.
- "And 'e wants a lot of money for it."

"Really?" said her mistress as before.

"I don't 'old with meddling with other folks' letters," the girl explained hurriedly, "but 'e's different, ma'am. An ill man to cross, as I told you once before. 'E says I'm to tell you as 'e picked it up, down somewhere south—I can't remember names, but 'e says you'll remember fast enough."

"Is it a letter of mine he picked up? and have you

brought it back to me, Joanna?"

"It's your letter, ma'am, but Jim says"—she reddened and stopped again, but finding her mistress silent, she made an effort and produced the man's message—"'e wants fifty pounds for it, ma'am."

"Is he quite mad, Joanna?"

"That's what I asked 'im, but 'e sticks to it—fifty pounds. You see, ma'am," she went on, more volubly, "Warren wants to try 'is luck in the Colonies. Says 'e isn't appreciated in these parts, and 'e wants to take me along, and—it all costs money."

"Oh, I can follow that part of the story very easily, Joanna. What I want to know is—why should I supply

the money?"

"It does seem a deal," said the girl simply, "for a bit of an old letter."

"It must be a very valuable letter. How does Warren describe it?"

"'E says, ma'am, that it's a sort of-of love-letter."

Griselda contrived to laugh in a rather hysterical fashion, but apparently the maid found it convincing and reassuring. Her face brightened, and she showed a sympathetic line of strong, white teeth.

"Well, I thought it was a fool's game all along," she said eagerly. "But I never know when Jim's making game of me. And 'e looked glum enough," she added, her smile

fading.

"Fifty pounds for a letter I wrote! You must tell him

the joke didn't appeal to me."

"Yes, ma'am. I'll tell 'im as you only laughed; and I'm sure, for my part, I'm glad it is a joke," she finished cor-

dially.

But as the girl made a movement to depart, Griselda spoke again. It was all very well to laugh at Joanna, but dared she laugh at the man with the glum face and his exorbitant demand? She was by no means sure that she could. While she considered the matter it would be well to give him an ambiguous answer.

"You mustn't tell him that," she began cautiously,

"Warren's a man it doesn't do to laugh at. You must tell him I was very astonished—that I'll speak to him myself by-and-by; that I suppose he wants a wedding present, and that I shall give you one, Joanna, but it certainly won't be as big as the one he asks for. As for the—the loveletter,"—she managed to infuse a delicate note of irony into the term—"I shall expect him to return it to me, just as I should expect him to return my handkerchief if he picked it up. I'm afraid, Joanna, you're going to marry an unscrupulous person."

"I'm afraid I am, ma'am," the girl agreed, but with an accent of pride rather than of anxiety. "I'll try and remember all that," she added, as she turned a second time to

leave the room.

This time she was not recalled, though her mistress looked after her departing figure with an air of uncertainty.

Left alone, she began to move restlessly about the room, her hands behind her back, her forehead wrinkled in perplexity.

"What in the world am I going to do?" she said more

than once, in an audible and miserable voice.

Eventually she sat down at her work-table, and taking a strip of cambric out of the basket standing upon it, she proceeded to set a row of tiny tucks in the material. She worked mechanically, but very neatly, for she had acquired considerable skill with her fingers during the last six And as she worked, she thought ceaselessly upon the answer she was to make to that exorbitant demand. Was there any form in which she could present the story to her husband, that would convince him of its inconsequence? For it was inconsequent; it did not belong, in the remotest degree, to her life with him. But would he see this important line of distinction? She doubted it, and the doubt pressed upon her courage, her common-sense-even upon her morality. His face would harden-oh! she knew the look. He gave it to her mother—to the wives of certain of his acquaintance; he had nearly—very nearly given it to

her, but she had turned play-actress just in time to stop him. Oh! he would forgive, as he had forgiven that hysterical outburst of the autumn, but it was not forgiveness she wanted of him.

A sensation of deadly lassitude came over her, and she let the work fall, with her hands, into her lap. She lay back in her chair and looked up, with dull eyes, at the intricate pattern wrought into the plaster of the ceiling. She looked at cupids, round and roguish, bound to one another by garlands of roses and leaves. She frowned at them and their inadequate, absurd insinuations. They professed to tell the story of life, but they concealed all the facts under pretty imagery; they trapped so many into the net, and smiled so wantonly over the struggles of their victims. Love went deeper than the root of a rose; it asked too much from the mother-breast. The force that had rioted so extravagantly in the schoolroom was half spent, was failing her, as it had failed others. She was aware that she had never fully recovered her physical strength, and the climax was coming.

When Harry came to join her at lunch, she had come to no decision, and all unconsciously he played into the hands of her weaker self. It was obvious that he had come home for an hour of recreation. He refused to see any appeal behind the wistfulness of her smile. And she dared not snap the thread of this half conscious obtuseness; dared not snap any thread that bound her to this man and his limitations. The nearer he came to her the more clearly could she hear the tune of temperamental disunion, but the more she heard of it, the more resolutely and obstinately did she repudiate her own intelligence. Let the look on his face be valueless, she must preserve it. Were his eyes to narrow at her, as they had threatened to do more than once, some spring, on which her buoyancy depended, would snap. He might be strong enough and shrewd enough and generous enough to read that letter and to smile over it, but she dared not run the risk of offering such a test to his faith in her. She would run other and baser risks first. She would see Warren and learn how far his power and his malice could go. Might it not be possible to invoke so bold and scornful an attitude that the ill-educated bully would succumb to it? Might she not recover and destroy that ridiculous, but dangerous, document by the same mysterious output of personal magnetism that had altered, once before, the direction of many lives? Alva had yielded to it readily; Harry had followed suit. If only that same breath of lawless courage would invade her pulses, that had been born of music, of scent, of careless egoism! But, with a fall of spirit, she had to acknowledge that, as yet, she felt no supernatural advocacy behind her purpose.

Late in the afternoon she wandered out into her garden; lingering for a minute or two on the upper terrace, where the sun was hot and the flowers were patterned curiously; where the bees popped fussily in and out of the poppies, setting their bright heads nodding with satisfaction or in-

dignation; idly she wondered which.

Then she moved on towards the kitchen garden, stopping repeatedly to pull up a weed here, or to snip a dead pansyhead there, but going steadily, if slowly, in one direction—towards the spot where she would be in full view of the stables, the spot to which, presently, Warren would come, to worst or be worsted. When she reached it a sense of chill came over her. It lay in shadow and in silence; there was no sunshine, and there were no cheerful bees. It was almost a relief when at length there came to her ear the sound of a heavy footfall.

"Good afternoon, Warren. Have you brought me my letter?" she said, so quickly and so easily as momentarily

to disconcert him.

"Yes-no-yes-ma'am," he stammered.

She put out an imperious hand.

"You should have returned it long ago. I can't understand why you didn't. And it was exceedingly impertinent to make a joke of the matter with your simple Joanna."

But the man had recovered from his first surprise,

"It wasn't a joke, ma'am. I shouldn't think of joking about anything serious."

It was Griselda's turn to show dismay, though she tried

to cover it by sharp speaking.

"Look here, Warren. I can't have any more of this nonsense. I'm sorry Mr. Dorset won't keep you. I did what I could, but the plan doesn't work. You don't suit the place, and you'll have to go. I shall hate to lose Joanna, and I think the Colonies will be a risk; but of course that's your affair. I shall give Joanna a wedding present, as I told her to tell you, but it won't be fifty pounds or anything like that sum."

She had hoped to introduce a jocular remark at this

point, but the expression on his face made it impossible.

"I don't want a present from you, ma'am," he said shortly.

"Then what do you want?"

"I want fifty pounds."

"For the letter?" she retorted, with as much light of disdain as she could command; "a letter you've no right to possess?"

"You'd no right to strike me in the face with your whip," he said doggedly, "so the least we both say about the

rights the better."

"Where did you find it?" she asked helplessly.

"About a hundred yards from the gate of The Monk's Revel."

"And what makes you suppose it worth so much money?"

"Various things, ma'am. In the first place, Mr. Glover

was main anxious to find it."

"He offered you money?" she began incautiously.

"Yes, ma'am; but I didn't want money for it—not at that time, anyway; and it wasn't for the letter money was offered."

"Then how do you know he was anxious to find it?"

"I see him, ma'am, some time before he sees me. I was lighting my pipe at the wayside—got off my bike for that

purpose, and I catches sight of the letter. To tell you truth, I made nothing of the find till I see the gentleman coming along, a-poking and a-peering into all the bushes. When 'e gets alongside I waits to be asked questions, but none come. That's queer, thinks I. We talks for a minute, quite pleasant, of the weather and of the peculiarities of the other sex, and 'e offers me money for the second time, and I tells 'im it isn't owed and it isn't wanted, and 'e says 'Good day,' and goes off. And by-and-by, when 'e thinks 'e's out of sight 'e begins poking and peering again, and I begins putting two and two together."

"And what," she asked coolly, "do your two and two

make?"

"Fifty pounds," he answered curtly.

"My arithmetic doesn't go so far as yours, Warren. You'll have to explain how you got such a remarkable

answer to such a trifling sum."

"Well, ma'am. I'm prepared to do that. You see, the gentleman wanted the letter main bad and wouldn't ask for it. There's one figure for you. The writing was uncommon pretty, a lady's writing. There's another figure. The only lady as I'd seen 'im with was yourself. There's figure three. And the only lady as I'd a quarrel with was yourself likewise. That's my fourth figure. I put 'em all together, and I went to a friend a bit better educated than myself-in the acting way, ma'am, and well used to reading love-letters of all sorts and kinds. This letter, so 'e said, wasn't an ordinary letter; 'e couldn't swear it was a loveletter, but 'is advice was, don't let go for nothing. Well, I didn't let go, but I'd pretty near forgotten all about it, when I come to town to see Joanna, and I see you at the same time, ma'am. Then the idea comes in my 'ead: 'try it on,' and I tried it on as you'll remember, and you got me the place."

"Yes, for Joanna's sake," she put in quickly.

"Well, ma'am, that's the point. Was it all for Joanna's sake?"

He was looking keenly at her, and she managed to meet

his eye steadily. She even managed a smile. She was quick-witted enough to see that her chance of worsting him lay in persuading him she trifled with the situation; that she meant to punish his audacity by leading him on, forcing him to commit himself definitely to the crime of blackmail. He had his doubts of her class. He had been fooled before by members of it. He chose his ground carefully, for there were one or two places where it would be possible for him to slip. His melodramatic friend might have exaggerated the value of those peculiar remarks. Or again, such remarks might be common among the upper ten, whose ways of thinking had long puzzled him. She had certainly interfered once on his behalf, but that might have been merely for her maid's sake. She had a nervous look and a smiling eye; she might be playing with the situation or fighting it. He would not commit himself rashly to defiance. On the whole, he fancied that he held her pride in the hollow of his hand. He fancied he could punish the blow she had dealt him, and revenge, at the same time, that abrupt dismissal of his master's. He fancied the letter meant, at all events, a certain amount of indiscretion, unconfessed to that superior and arbitrary young man, who had disliked and distrusted him from the first.

"I don't want to push you, ma'am, and I don't want to threaten," he said slowly; "I don't suppose you keep fifty pounds in your pocket. There's no particular 'urry. There's a month before I get the sack, so perhaps you'll be good enough to think the thing over. Maybe the letter isn't worth nothing; maybe you're laughing at me in your sleeve; I don't pretend to understand gentlefolks any more than I pretend to like 'em. Maybe, when you think it over, fifty pounds won't be too much to give to a girl like Joanna, as you've liked and made a fuss of."

Her mouth curled a little at the cheap nature of this bulwark to possible concession he was erecting for her, but she was still powerless to produce a definite form of defiance. He spoke of time, and the word sent a thrill to her heart. For it was time she wanted. A month! A

month in which to garner love and courage, wisdom and eloquence; a month in which to make that indelible impression on a heart legitimately hers; a month in which to find that elusive, but certainly existent, hour, which must bring him so utterly beneath the spell of her innate loyalty, that the true case, and not the circle of accessory and damnatory facts about it, could be inserted into her husband's intelligence. Dimly she became aware that the man was going. He was leaving her to this invigorating rush of optimistic feeling. Blindly she looked after his retreating figure; mechanically she listened to the sound of his steps as they died away. But when she found herself alone, her momentary sensation of acquittal was disturbed by a detestable memory.

Time! She had been given time before. What had she done with it? How should one month achieve what all the others had failed to achieve? What had delay ever done for her, save paralyze her natural powers? A hundred recollections of failure—of cowardice flocked up; and look where she would in her shame and desperation, it was al-

ways to find but a single door of escape.

Fifty pounds? If she recoiled from the figures, it was always to return, and to return with a diminution of contempt for her own weakness; it was always to find the significance of the sum reduced. She had never been impressed by money, save as a means to an end, and now, in this care-free atmosphere, her old estimate of its triviality returned. One wrote the amount on the leaf of a paper book and there the matter ended; there was not even the chink of coin to remind one of the ingredients that go to the making of the sum. And there were all sorts of condoning considerations behind this simple solution of the trouble. There was Harry's happiness—his peculiar wealth of prejudice, to protect. She would much prefer to be loved with understanding, but it was he, not she, who drew the lines so sharply, who forced her into dissimulation—from point to point of it. She had taken him by this mock force and she must hold him by it. It was not her fault but her misfortune; and with the platitude she betook herself indoors, to the dainty room, with its incongruous air of peace and simplicity, the room she had compelled him to use as freely as she did herself, the room where, presently, she would play, for the last time, the ignoble game of intrigue.

CHAPTER XXXI

A QUESTION OF MORE THAN FIFTY POUNDS

Dorset was engaged upon the building of his new cottages, and he came in later than usual. In fact, little Harry was being carried out as big Harry strolled in. Griselda was accustomed to follow the baby upstairs, to enjoy a pleasant skirmish with Joanna concerning the heat of the bath, the length of time it was desirable to keep the child in it, or any other matter for argument that might come uppermost; but to-night she remained in her seat on the Chesterfield, and her husband looked with some surprise at her, as he handed her the bundle of letters he had secured from the postman on his way in. She turned them over listlessly, until she reached the last.

"From Alva," she said, with a slight access of interest in her manner; and she proceeded to open it, while Harry

poured himself out a cup of tea.

"Any news?" he asked carelessly.

"Yes, plenty, of a sort. But it's always the same sort; all about poor children from the city. Alva is quite beyond me. She used to shrink from dirt and distress of every sort, and now she seems to give all her time and all her thoughts, and I can't think how much of her money, to rescue-work and philanthropy generally. And Peter backs her up. His mother's furious, I heard from mama. And Mrs. Fawcett is making herself positively ill with disapproval. It's the last use she meant that big dowry to be put to, and she's taken an oath not to leave Alva another penny."

He began to laugh, but stopped, aware that Griselda was

staring mournfully before her.

"What's up?" he inquired. "Have you been quarreling with the boy?"

She only shook her head, and he came to sit beside her.

"Tired, eh? Want to be petted?"

The opening was too propitious to be ignored.

"No. I want to be scolded. I've been extravagant."

She felt him recoil ever so slightly, and then she felt—almost she saw—the impulse that brought him back to her.

"You always were. You were badly brought up, Griselda."

The levity was forced; but that he should produce it at all, was a concession she was not slow to appreciate.

"I want fifty pounds, Harry," she said; and now he

started back, far enough to get a full view of her face.

"Give me your bills to add up. You're such a duffer at arithmetic. Last time you went wrong you had the shillings running into the pound column."

"Yes, but not this time," she answered almost inaudibly.

"Fifty pounds, Griselda? It's nonsense—or else mismanagement."

"Yes; that's just what it is. Nonsense and mismanagement. It will cost all that to get straight again. It's a great deal, I know it is, but—but——"

"But you've two hundred a year," he finished for her. "You said it was enough—more than enough—when I gave

it you."

He stopped in his turn, for the tears were welling from beneath her lowered lids. It was terrible—fatal, to collapse so early, but even as the prevision of despair came to her, she felt his hand on her hair.

"Don't cry; tell me where it went to."

This unexpected return to gentleness was almost unendurable. She turned her head away, leaving her childish profile to his scrutiny.

"It's a nuisance," he went on, "but it isn't a tragedy.

Come, tell me how you got into such a knot."

"I didn't calculate," she said with difficulty, for the tears

320 A Question of More than Fifty Pounds

were in her throat as well, choking her utterance. "I never learnt to calculate. But it's the last mistake, and I promise to make it good. I only want you to lend it me. I can pay it back. It's very foolish of me, but I didn't guess that money mattered very much to us. You seemed to like to feel my hand in your pocket—not quite so much lately, perhaps. I might have known—I ought to have known that cottages cost a lot of money to build. I won't forget again, indeed I won't."

She turned to him, but found a less amenable aspect than she had expected. He was looking, not at her, but down at the carpet, seeing, she felt sure, a vision of his cottages, his tenantry, his whole scheme of fitness sacrificed to the

whims of a selfish, stupid woman.

But the mere reminder of possible condemnation from him was enough to recall all her fighting qualities. Again she was the prey of a single exigeant idea. She must tear the fatal letter, ship her enemy to the Colonies. The right and the wrong in the affair ceased to affect her. She must remain the mistress of his heart at any cost. All her ingenuity rushed to the protection of this insistent need.

"Look at me, Harry. Not that way. That's the look you give mama, and I won't bear it. Write the cheque, and then forget all about it, and come back to our happiness. Couldn't you—wouldn't you—believe my promise that it's the last time I'll ask such a thing? I've grown up in a night to—to an understanding of the value of money. After to-day I shall be just like the wives of other people."

"I don't know that I want that," he admitted, yielding

reluctantly to the influence she exercised.

Impulsively she put out her hands and drew his face close to her own, relieved to be out of range of his eyes.

"I thought you'd be so much more angry," she whispered into the ear nearest.

"So I will, next time."

"I thought you'd want to go through all my accounts, and find fault with every item."

"So I will, if there's the faintest chance of your having made a mistake."

"There isn't," she assured him hastily. "But tell me something. Where will the fifty pounds come from?"

"Supposing I'm weak enough to give it you—it will come

out of the bank."

"I ought to have said, Harry, where would it have gone to if I hadn't asked for it?"

"I can't tell you."

"You mean you won't tell me."

"Not till you pay me back, at all events. Now let me go, and I'll write the cheque for you, against my principles, you know."

"Will you think hard thoughts while you are writing?" she questioned, the hint of coquetry concealing consider-

able anxiety.

"You're expensive. I shall probably have to think that. Almost as expensive, Griselda, as that new cob of mine. According to Craddock we've nothing to offer such a high-class animal. He wants a new outfit, from shoes to a loose-box."

But she did not laugh. Instead, she looked nervously at him.

"Oh, that's where the fifty pounds will come from! I understand," she said bitterly. "That's how you'll pay me back. You'll sell the new cob; you've had an offer already—Craddock told me—but you refused, and now—you're going to accept it. You'll use that horrid, thick-legged roan Annie forced you to take off her hands, and I shall be miserable."

He looked discomposed at her sagacity in following what he flattered himself was an elusive trail.

"I'd serious thoughts of selling from the first, only Craddock over-persuaded me," he explained. "There's no point in pottering round on an animal of that sort; I'm always pottering, you know, and the roan's good enough for that."

"You won't potter after the cottages are finished and

when I'm out again," she declared vehemently. "I'm going to ride next week. Think of the mare you bought me beside Annie's old roan; it's ridiculous. If you sell the cob

I shall know that you're vindictive."

She was meddling now with the thin ice of his generosity. The action should have seemed unwarrantable under the circumstances, and he was puzzled to account for his own inward bias towards amenability. For a full minute he sat regarding her, searching for that something in her aspect that was proving so oddly influential. Perhaps it was the touch of physical weakness giving to her youth the semblance of surrender; perhaps he recognized in her pose the spirit of submission masquerading in a guise of petulant authority. At all events he found it possible—even pleasant—to make this second concession, and he rose, still silent, to fetch his cheque-book from the study, on the floor below. He re-entered the room softly, and came behind her, putting his hands about the rounded childish throat.

"I've brought it you. It's in my pocket. I've granted two exorbitant demands, but in the fairy-tales—and really there's an atmosphere of unreality about this room to-night—they always indulge in three at a time. What's the last, Griselda?"

"I'm keeping it," she said, in an uncertain voice. "If you said 'no' to it the wheel would stop. This little pulse you're pressing in my neck would begin to beat dully. All the pulses in me would grow tired and uninterested. All the movement in me hangs on the answer to that last demand. You won't ask for it now, will you?"

On an impulse of tenderness so rare as to startle her he leant forward, pressing his face into her hair, murmuring broken phrases—lover's nonsense, carried for the moment upon a wave of boyish passion into an extravagance of expression she had but seldom induced in him. Coming in answer to her treacherous assault it was not to be endured, and fiercely she freed herself from his hands. She sprang to her feet, looking fearfully at him across the dividing

sofa, and with an air of ruffled pride, as boyish as his late

fit of passion, he looked back at her.

"You're incomprehensible to-night," he complained, and thrust his hand into his pocket. He produced the cheque, frowned slightly at his own signature, and held it out to her.

Mechanically she took it, folded it small, her eyes always on his. She was breathing quickly, and it was as though some quality in her was generating force. But if it was the impulse towards confession, he was no longer in the mood to encourage any freedom of expression.

"High time we went to dress," he observed lightly and

abruptly, as he turned to leave the room.

For a considerable time she stood where he had left her, perfectly motionless, save for that rapid rise and fall of her breast. She looked down now at the folded paper in her palm, as though magnetized by it into that rigidity of body. And all the time her mind worked rapidly, painfully. It was her generosity that smarted. He had yielded, so quickly, so fully. He had offered her so much more than the money. With a low cry of self-hatred she broke the spell that held her motionless, and the very spirit of nervous unrest seemed to assail her. She threw the cheque carelessly down upon her desk; she began to pace the room, but it grew too small, and on a sudden thought she hurried out of it, and up to the nursery on the floor above.

It was a relief to find the baby crying, and Joanna actually ignoring him for the moment, in favor of the tidying of a drawer. Griselda embarked eagerly upon a lecture concerning the danger of neglecting young children, but as Joanna only received it with placid civility, filling every pause with a pleasant "yes indeed, ma'am" or "that's very true, ma'am," she proved a broken reed as safety-

valve to strong emotions.

"If you're going to stay and see 'im off, ma'am," she said, as soon as her mistress finished the harangue, "I'll be getting down to my supper. It's no use two of us being worried with a fretful child."

324 A Question of More than Fifty Pounds

She didn't even leave an opening for objection, but with a cheery "Good night" she took herself off.

She was within her rights, for the hour was late, and Griselda had declared her own intention of putting the boy to sleep five minutes before, but it was a blow to see that broad, black back disappear, for with it went the last barrier between herself and the real point of disturbance to her

equanimity.

She paced the nursery floor, as she had paced the one below it, and she was grateful, at least, for the wailing of the child. It was a divergence from rule, this putting him to sleep in her arms, and Joanna knew it. Joanna had been meant to tell her so, to argue, to provide a new field of exercise for her agitated mind, and Joanna had played her false with her civility and her retreat. Little Harry was not slow to appreciate the position. He meant to take his time about going to sleep. It was delightful to be ridden up and down and chanted to, and rocked about. At every slight decrease of exertion on the part of his nurse, he emitted a warning cry. He even whimpered a little, at intervals, when the motion remained steady, just to advertise the fact that he was on the qui vive for treachery.

But Griselda dreaded the moment when this spirit of opposition should also fail her and sink to sleep, for then she would be at the mercy of these new revolutionary thoughts and impressions. She would be compelled to

accept them in all their exacting cruelty.

Thirty, forty times she crossed the long room, singing of Peter Piper and Peter Pan, of a baby on a tree-top and a kitten in a well, and all the while a hammer was beating steadily into her consciousness the knowledge that the victory of the afternoon was vain. It was appalling; it was illogical; it was insulting to reason, but momentarily it became more clear to her perceptions that she could not make use of her material success.

In vain the old arguments, the old fears, threatened her with destruction; in vain she reminded herself that she was still a stranger to this husband she had tricked; in vain she told herself that she could not live, save in amity with him, and always each argument was met and worsted by the same irresistible intuition: that it was mock union she struggled to set face to face with real union. And the reason for this sudden change of front?

Reason! The word made her smile. Reason had little to do with the rush of emotion born of his touch. She was yielding, melting, losing her fighting qualities, at the memory of those hands about her throat, at the memory of his face pressed suddenly against her hair. Doubtless to himself he was calling that lapse from his usual attitude a weakness, and it was this same weakness and nothing else that took from her every artificial quality. Policy was as wax under the breath of it. She was going back into innocence and candor—or was it forward?

When she laid the sleeping baby down, she only knew that she laid aside with the weight of him, another weight—that of self-disgust and indecision. She lingered, staring down at his ludicrous profile, half-buried in the pillow. Again there swept through her with the might of wind, an impression of advocacy, and again it was the great French poet who could have worded for her the translation of it.

"Grâce au nom du berceau," he had pleaded more than once for other unfortunates, and not in vain.

Griselda had not heard these stories, but she felt the courage creeping into her veins. It was not the courage that had come to her in that dim conservatory of what now seemed to be the days of long ago. There was no scent of flowers about it, no note of music, no treading on air, no sense of irresponsibility. This was no fairy coaxing her willing feet back to her dear deserted play-room. She went down to war and the horrid details of war. She went slowly planning her tactics, struggling to produce out of the chaotic medley of her sensations the single line of defense that should lead, not only to forgiveness, but to justification.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE THIRD AND LAST DEMAND

WHILE Harry smoked his after-dinner cigar by himself, his wife, alone in the drawing-room, saw fit to make a first and a decisive move in the new scheme of action.

Had she been less absorbed by the moral aspect of the affair, she might have remembered that it is scarcely wise to burn all your boats when venturing into an unknown and possibly hostile country; but it was her own, inner impulse towards treachery that she feared when she put a steady finger on the bell and despatched the man who answered her summons, to fetch Joanna.

The girl came promptly, and with the air of one who

hurries to meet reassuring news.

"You've seen Warren, I suppose, Joanna?"

"Yes, ma'am. I've just come from 'im. And it isn't a joke, ma'am, and 'e says the answer you sent isn't satis-

factory and you'd be sure to change it."

Plainly the simple creature waited for another, more calculated to satisfy her incomprehensible tyrant, but her face fell as she realized that this new attitude was less likely to please even than the last her mistress had taken

up.

"He's quite right. I had no business to treat the matter so lightly; but I was surprised for the moment at such impertinence. Here's the right answer to it, Joanna. Tell him he is to do precisely what he pleases with the letter, since, for some reason, he doesn't seem inclined to return it to its writer. The owner is dead, as he probably knows, and the letter is of no consequence to anybody. But if he thinks it is, if he thinks there's fifty pounds or even fifty

pence in it, he's perfectly at liberty to try and get it—only not from me," she finished, with unmistakable resolution.

"Oh dear, dear! I daren't give Jim that message,"

Joanna moaned.

"I order you to give it him. There's no hurry, of course," she added more gently. "Choose your opportunity, when he's in a good temper; he is in a good temper now and then, I suppose?"

"There'll be such a fuss as never was, ma'am."

"You must expect fuss and worry, if you agree to marry a man of that stamp. We don't care to have servants about us with such unpleasant ways of trying to make money. You can go, Joanna, for I haven't anything more to say."

She had caught the sound of her husband's whistle in the passage leading to the dining-room. The girl had caught it too, and, with a last troubled look backward, she took her

departure.

It was mysterious and reassuring to find herself listening with positive equanimity to that approaching step. Was it possible, that to the defense of all the finer issues of life there flocked the qualities necessary for their protection? There was a ring of energy in the voice with which she hailed the new arrival.

"I want you so badly! Come and sit beside me, quite

close. I've something to tell you."

He took the place she indicated—the arm of the big chair, and looked with lazy appreciation into her animated face.

"Surely you've told me enough for one day."

"I've told you too much, Harry. I want to untell some of it. I don't want the money after all."

"What? You added up the figures wrong?"

"Yes-but not the figures in my account-book," she ex-

plained more slowly.

"Now, don't be enigmatical. We're talking of fifty pounds. If you wanted it before dinner, why don't you want it now?"

"I'm going to tell you; that's why I called to you."

"But you're such a long time about it," he complained irritably.

"Haven't you ever made mistakes, Harry?"

"Not in my accounts—at least, not to such a big extent. Mind you, it's a comfort to find ourselves on the right side of that sum," he added more amenably, "but hurry up and

tell me how we got there."

"I can't be hurried or I shall bring the story out wrong. There are questions I must put to you. I want the answers to help me across it, as the stepping-stones help one across a rough piece of water. Now don't fidget and don't frown. We've got a long evening before us. Were you never like other little boys, Harry? Did you never steal the jam out of the storeroom cupboard or the apples out of the orchard? Did you never put wet sponges on the top of the bathroom door when pompous old gentlemen-visitors were going to the bath? Did you never tell lies and get found out and thrashed and feel small and horrid and despicable?"

"Now why this aggressive championship of law and

order?" he inquired, not ill-humoredly.

"I'm not their champion. I'm on the other side; but I want you to be there too, beside me. I want you to think of all the things you left undone which you ought to have done and vice versa, and, when your mind is black with the memories of iniquities, I shall tell you a secret."

"I'm convinced I shan't like the secret," he fenced, half in real and half in affected protest against this ominous

attitude and what it might be expected to presage.

"There are such lots of things you don't approve," she complained childishly, and she thrust her hands impulsively between his.

"What am I supposed to do with them, Griselda?"

"To look at them very closely, please."

"They're uncommonly pretty."

"You're not looking attentively enough."

Yielding to her influence, he brought them nearer to his

eyes and turned them over. "Still pretty," he said, "and all the prettier for that row of tiny scars on the left first finger."

"Ah, that's what I wanted!" she exclaimed exultantly. "Now you're to examine my face; tell me, can you see any

little scars on that?"

She brought it close to him, and in silence he regarded it.

"Well?" she said impatiently.

"I can't see any, Griselda."

She sighed softly, and leant back in her seat.

"Is it just the same round, senseless face you saw in Mrs. Fawcett's back drawing-room?"

"I'm not sure," he began uncertainly, and stopped.

"Do you remember all the nonsense I talked that night, Harry?"

"Some of it."

"About the soul?"

"It never looks out of the window," he saw fit to quote, after reflection.

"That's what I said, in my ignorance, or because I hadn't a soul to look out in those days. But now I have. Can't you see it?"

Again she leant forward, offering the plastic mask to

his near inspection.

"I can see blue water, colored by chance or an ancestress with a partiality for that particular shade," he told her

teasingly.

"The grandmothers are all dead," she retorted, "dead and buried; and quite right too. They had their turn and it's over. There's only me here, and I don't belong to any race or family, except our little one. I don't even belong to my old self, and certainly not to mama or to that back drawing-room. I belong to you, only to you, Harry. Do you believe me?" she asked him for the second time.

"Of course I believe you."

But at the simple utterance, to which her fancy attached such excess of meaning, her faculties dropped, like birds before the gun of an unerring shot. A lump rose in her throat, impeding utterance, swamping all but the divine conviction that he understood; that there would be no need to produce that long and complicated argument, tormenting to her ingenuity. The alibi she had thought to move only by the exercise of superhuman exertion, he would grant her, without so much as a question. That girl-sinner of long ago was nothing to him; no more, in fact, than the dolls of her childhood were to her. But, as she leant yet closer to offer her face and its wealth of rapturous gratitude to his kiss, a tap fell on the door.

She recoiled, and, to her inflamed fancy, the portly figure at which she now stared was synonymous with that of fate, summoned to her undoing, with due deference to the

laws of desert and punctuality.

Groping for a saner explanation of this interruption, her terror managed to recall the premature shaft of defiance launched so boldly at the enemy of her peace. Could Joanna have found with such miraculous speed that propitious mood necessary to the conveyance of her message? or was she, unlike her mistress, an advocate for prompt action?

Doubt was all too speedily disposed of by the butler's voice.

"Warren to see you, sir."

"Oh, confound Warren! I've seen quite as much of the fellow as I want already."

"The matter was urgent, sir."

"Very well. Put him in my study. I'll come directly." The man withdrew, and, as the catch of the door snapped behind him, Griselda began to speak nervously.

"I want to tell you myself. Nobody else is to tell you."
He shook off her hands, lying appealingly on his sleeve,

and took up a position with his back to the fire.

"What must you tell me?" he said coldly. "Where the mysterious need for fifty pounds has gone to?"

"About Warren," she said faintly. "You mustn't go to him yet."

The slight frown on his face changed to a laugh.

"Oh, Warren!" he said disdainfully. "Warren's a question you don't meddle with again."

"But I must."

"No, you don't," he broke in, now with an air of despotic levity. "Joanna's a nice enough girl, but she isn't quite indispensable to our comfort. I don't want to lose her, but if Warren's the only price at which we can keep her, the sooner she goes the better."

"Listen, Harry."

"Not to a word," he said, and moved towards the door, from which point he looked back, still with that laugh in his eyes, at her air of terrified dejection.

"If that was the third demand, Griselda, held in reserve, I'm afraid you'll have to consider it unequivocally refused."

She had no power to stop him and no right, she whispered miserably to herself. She had had her chance—her hundred chances—to take the affair into her own hands, and she had dallied with them—flown from them. True, there was that glorious impression of a few minutes back. Those few pregnant words of trust, the look that went with them, she could not forget, and she could not resign herself to desperation with that wonderful memory so near.

Hope and fear began to battle in her breast.

To the material threat in her occasion she accorded scant attention. She felt certain that Harry would cope with that easily enough. He was too deliberate, too self-controlled to be startled into any expression of astonishment or dismay before a servant he both disliked and distrusted. He would put the would-be blackmailer (who had throughout evinced more malice than confidence) to rout, and without resource to any more scandalous weapon than his satiric tongue. His laugh would convince the fellow that hers had been genuine. He would pass out of their lives; but what would pass with him? That was the question. In terror she invoked her single champion—that glorious moment when he had said, so simply, so convincingly, "Of course I believe you."

Surely the mark had been made, and, as surely, it must be stronger than any the next hour was to make. He might frown; he might even compel her to some penance of explanation; she might be obliged, after all, to produce that involved tale of excuse. Alva, she thought, would have welcomed such an opportunity for detailed selfdissection, but she shrank from it. It meant such expenditure of patience; it meant such pain. Like Alva, she had the ear to catch the rustle in the ancient strips of tapestry; the eye to find a light behind the painted faces in the Gallery; like Alva, she called to fairy princes in the night-time, but her cry was a vastly different one; it was always: "come down," not "take me up." She, too, had wanted the magic, hovering so distractedly just out of reach, but she wanted it for the gilding of her prose, for the glorification of that everyday life, to which, more fiercely every day, her faculties were consecrated.

And, meantime, Harry was interviewing the man in the study, and looking, for the first time, at the scar, that only

appeared in moments of rare excitement.

Warren was excited now. He was aware that his belated scheme of vengeance would fall to the ground, unless very carefully manipulated. He was versed sufficiently in the ways of the "gentry" to know that they had odd scruples concerning the laws of possession, so long-he added cynically—as the article in question was not animal, and he was convinced his master would only consent to read the letter, if persuaded that the writer wished him to do so.

The man had, therefore, been put to considerable trouble to find the argument necessary for the creation of such an

impression.

"It's about my character, sir," he said civilly; "I know you 'aven't taken to me, and I can't expect you to tell other gentlemen as you 'ave. Still, I'm sure you'll allow, sir, in common fairness, that it's been more my misfortune than my fault that I failed to please."

The young man looked at him a trifle less aggressively.

There was enough truth in the statement to make it effective. It was mainly upon the "Dr. Fell" principle that the fellow had been condemned.

"Can't you dispense with my verdict altogether?" he in-

quired. "You've only been here about six months."

"Well, sir, folks is that particular in these days; they don't like a gap of six months. But there's this letter, sir; I thought perhaps you wouldn't object to indorsing what the writer says: only that I'm honest and steady and don't shirk my work."

He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and produced an envelope; it contained a couple of sheets of notepaper, and, with an air of hurry, he singled out one and handed it to his master. The writing was unmistakable, so the man

trusted was the inference.

Harry looked sharply at the large, clear, and remarkably beautiful formation of the words. It had been a pleasure and something of a surprise to discover anything so perfect in Griselda as this handwriting. At the present moment, however, his pleasure was swamped in the thought that she had again been working to the advantage of the groom he so cordially disliked. He recalled her anxiety of a few minutes back when he had been called away; her desperate attempt to make confession, doubtless of this secret act of advocacy. Joanna must have persuaded her to write the letter of recommendation which he was asked to endorse. It was irritating to have his hand forced in this fashion, but it was not criminal, and in any case it did not suit his idea of dignity to show any distaste for the task.

"I can probably do that much," he said, and opened the

letter.

" April 20th, 1906.

"Dear Anthony,—I hate myself and you and even those beautiful pine-woods. Will I come again? No, a thousand times no! Why did I ever come—I—who belong to somebody else?"

Thus far was he carried by the atmosphere of miscon-

struction, but it was far enough, so his persecutor believed, to effect the object in view, for in those preliminary sentences there stood, to his evil thinking, a pretty strong case against the writer of them.

As he crushed the letter in his hand, Harry knew instinctively that his recoil was bound to be but temporary. In the end he must return and speculate, but in the meantime it behooved him to turn a cool glance on to the man opposite.

He found hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness upon the fellow's coarse features—in sum, an unmistakable answer to part of the puzzle. The letter had been given with intention, not in error, as for a moment he had supposed, remembering that air of hurry.

Carried away now by what he held to constitute success,

Warren broke out into voluble and vindictive speech.

"It was writ to Mr. Glover, sir, down in Sussex, while you was in foreign parts. I see them together one day, and I picks up the letter next day. Mr. Glover 'adn't the best of reputations in our part of the world, sir, as you'll maybe remember—and—I kept the letter."

Harry allowed him to get so far without interruption, for he required a second or two in which to decide upon his

own tactics.

- "Mr. Glover's reputation isn't the question," he answered coolly. "The question is, how does this letter come to be in your possession more than a year after it was written?"
 - "I tell you I picked it up, sir."

"And you've read it?"

"Well, sir, yes sir-that is, a friend read it for me."

"He must have told you to whom it belonged. Why didn't you return it to Mr. Glover?"

"Well, sir, there was reasons."

"Look sharp with them, Warren."

"Well, sir, it was such a queer letter," he ventured.

"Queer?—in what way?"

"You didn't read it all, sir."

"Of course not. It isn't addressed to me. I shouldn't

have read any of it if I could have helped myself. It wasn't written by me or to me, and I can't conceive why

you forced it on to me in that underhand fashion."

Warren grew yet more confused. His latent distrust of the morality of gentlefolks returned to trouble him. If the master didn't object to the beginning of the letter he certainly wouldn't object to the rest of it. The man tried to bluster.

"If Joanna wrote a letter like that to any one but me— I'd see 'er far enough before I married 'er," he said hotly. "And you'd be quite right, Warren. If she could write

"And you'd be quite right, Warren. If she could write a letter of this kind she couldn't be too far removed from you and your sphere."

Warren understood enough of the meaning of this retort

to rouse him into further anger.

"I'm not a scholar, sir, nor perhaps is the man I took that letter to, but we're not fools, neither, and I tell you, Mr. Glover 'ad an uncommon bad reputation down our way."

"I see. And you thought my wife might be unaware of it? But haven't you brought us this kindly warning a little late? Mr. Glover's reputation is a thing of the past."

"I'll tell you straight, sir, what brought me 'ere. You

see that scar?"

"Very distinctly," said Harry, with what sounded like satisfaction.

"She struck me, sir. She was riding with Mr. Glover and she lost her temper with the cob, but it was me she struck, and I vowed to make 'er pay. Next day I come across Mr. Glover looking for that there letter, but 'e didn't ask for it and I didn't give it. I thought it might come in useful some day."

"Don't shout so," his master said. "I can hear perfectly well what you say. You thought the letter would be

useful? In what way?"

Warren found some difficulty in getting back to his old trail under the lash of this apparent indifference.

"I reckon she'll want it back, sir."

But Harry shook his head.

"I can assure you she won't. She sets no undue value on her own epistolatory powers. But the point, Warren, is still unexplained; why do you return it so late?"

"I pretty near forgot all about it, sir, till I come to town to see Joanna, and I see you two, and then the idea comes

to me to ask her for a shop."

"Ah! you traded on her affection for Joanna. Well, we shall both be sorry to lose the girl, but if she means to stick to you and your fortunes, it's just as well we should sever our connection with her at once."

The man saw, not only his vengeance, but various minor hopes of material advantage, slipping away.

"She's promised us a wedding present," he said sulkily.

"But not the one you asked for," Harry supplemented, on a breath of inspiration. "She thought fifty pounds a trifle too much, even for a favorite maid."

Warren lost his remnant of self-control.

"It's damned unfair!" he broke out. "You're to strike us and keep back our characters, and if we stand up to you, we're a play; you're to get your bit of fun out of us. She said it was a joke once, but I didn't believe she meant it, but I'll stand no more British masters; I'll try another country, where maybe they'll take a man for what he's worth."

"The question is, what are you worth, Warren?"

The groom's eyes, falling before his master's, lit upon the crushed letter, and chagrin found vent in a last spurt of defiance.

"She's told you the story, but I doubt if she's told you all. Perhaps, when I've gone, and you sit down to read that letter you're so mightily uncurious about, you won't smile so careless and pleasant. You didn't get far, sir, and —there's four sides to it," he finished maliciously.

"You really doubt this uncurious aspect of mine. Well,

I'd better set your mind at rest, once for all."

He lit a candle standing on the writing-table at his elbow, and held the paper in the flame. When nothing but a few blackened fragments remained, he turned to his companion with a change of manner.

"You'd better go now, Warren."

There was more than advice in the utterance, and the man moved hastily in the direction of the door.

With the handle between his fingers, and the passage in full view, he found courage to whine a last protest against the treatment he had received.

"After all, I did my duty, sir; 'ow was I to know ladies and gentlemen wrote them sort of letters to everybody? It was my mistake."

"Exactly, Warren—your mistake; and Mrs. Dorset allows me to bring it home to you in any fashion I may think advisable. I've tried reason, but if you don't clear out in half a second, I'll try what we call brute force."

Warren took less than the allotted space of time to effect his final retreat, and Harry found himself alone with his discovery.

Rapidly he recalled the few sentences, whose possible and probable significance he had till now held at bay. Mercilessly he added to the sum of suspicion the memory of those occasions when Griselda had irritated him by a mysterious call upon his tolerance. There was the scene of the autumn; he had called it ridiculous; now he called it by a harder name. There was the money—the fifty pounds, that he had flung, with such intuitive skill, into that fellow's surly face. He recalled the look of her as she had begged for it; the strangeness of her manner when he had yielded it, with what, for him, was impulsive generosity. Oh! he began to understand—all—all; even the return of it; though the thought of a limit to her liability brought him no softening of mood, his old estimate of her stood too high to allow him to recognize degrees in culpability as yet.

Glover! He mused for some minutes over this man of ugly reputation; over the short and sordid story of his life and death.

April! The month stuck in his memory, and he recalled her letters of that date. They had been warm, passionate

338 The Third and Last Demand

even, and it was from this sinister flame that the spark had been struck which had influenced him so powerfully. He had not owned it; he had written stiffly, educationally, but inwardly he had been conscious of yielding to her influence, and, from the moment of their reunion, he had agreed to let her temper at least the cruder tendencies in him. And he had yielded to a vulgar sorceress—to a pretty woman, with Venner blood in her veins, and Venner subtlety behind that dainty child's face he had been slowly learning to reverence and adore.

She was false—there was the upshot of it; but she was his; and he found a brutal pleasure in the knowledge that, if he might know no longer love and trust, he might still hurt her.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CASE FOR THE DEFENSE

THERE were but few nights when a small fire was not desirable, at least to Griselda, whose lines had always fallen much further south. But on this particular one it burnt cheerlessly, and only an occasional tongue of flame managed to force its way round the rather damp log in the middle of it.

The two long windows, placed side by side at one end of the room, were open, and a pale remnant of daylight crept from each of them to mingle with the almost equally faint firelight.

To this dim and depressing stage Harry returned so softly that it was only when he took his place on the arm of his wife's chair that she became aware of his presence.

"No light, Griselda?" he said calmly, and with a thumping heart she leant forward, waiting for the next flicker from the fire to illumine his face.

When it came she shivered a little.

"No. I don't want the lamp just yet. But oh, how cold it is! Just like a vault; and you look just like the stone knights who lie on their stone tombs, with stone faces and stone hearts, caring nothing for the people who come to look at them. I'm frightened, Harry. You're so near me and yet so terribly far away. What did he say—the man in the study?"

"Whatever he said, I'll be bound he wishes now that he'd held his tongue. The letter is in the fire—at least it's

burnt."

"Did you read it?" she whispered.

"The first few lines," he answered curtly; and she dropped a sigh.

"How like my luck! The first few lines—'I hate you and myself, and the beautiful pine-woods.' Was that all,

Harry?"

"Not quite, Griselda. I read that you would never go to them again—you—' who belonged to somebody else.' I got as far as the great renunciation; but you did go again, didn't you? You went with the somebody else. They weren't the same pine-woods, of course, and perhaps that's why you evinced no sense of discomfort, or perhaps——" He stopped, aware of the wealth of irony invading his tone, and changed the key. "What induced you to return the money?"

"I don't know," she answered wearily, "unless it was the impulse that brought Judas back with his ill-gotten

gains."

There was a spell of silence, then the gray melancholy in which they sat was shot with warmth and color; the log slipped, and the flames crept round and over it, throwing out bright shafts of light into the circle about the big chair.

"I'll find it now," said Griselda suddenly and gladly.

"Find what—a new deception?" he said, but to deaf ears.

"It goes and comes," she went on, spreading her hands to the cheery blaze. "It was here such a little while ago—then it went out—now it's coming back. Warren told you part of the story, but not all. I'm going to tell you the whole of it."

"You think it advisable? For my part, I let a sleeping

dog lie."

"It's not sleeping, if you mean your anger," she retorted swiftly. "You don't impose on me by that air of self-control. I've deceived you—more than once, Harry, but—

but I have my excuse."

He made no reply, only sat looking down at the carpet, and she knew that he saw nothing of the beautiful Persian design; he saw, instead, a gruesome pattern of human treachery. There was in this man, she remembered, no safety-valve; his conception of dignity forbade him all vio-

lence of expression. She looked forward, through æons of time, watching his secret anger eat into that estimate of herself, built up with such laborious patience. He would never denounce, and he would never fully condone—unless—unless—she could perform the miracle.

"You're not going to listen," she said wildly. "You are only going to listen to those words of long ago said so

thoughtlessly to somebody else."

The charge was true. He made no attempt to deny it. His mind was wrapped up in conjecture. He wanted to listen to that detestable inner voice; and what right had she to stop him?—to take so high and bold a stand? He meant to brood on the thought of her communion with some one else. It tortured his pride that any other should have enjoyed, for a day, for an hour, the freedom of that city, taken so carelessly, held so patronizingly, that city, that slowly but surely had laid its chains upon his free spirit. And because his pride forbade him to ask for the lines of limit her girlish recklessness might, or might not, have set, he now told himself that he should never be free from that abominable whisper of suspicion.

"You won't look at me," she said, turning her face back to the fire, "but in common justice you must listen to what I say. When I was a little girl, I saw my home taken away by a law I couldn't understand. Mama cried, but I was too angry to cry. I told myself that when I was bigger I should take it back. I didn't in the least know how, but that was of no consequence. I used to feel then, and sometimes I feel now, that if you want a thing very desperately, you're

bound to get it. The longing creates it for you."

Her voice was gaining courage and her tongue speed.

"Presently they sent me to school, Harry, and I forgot a good deal of my sense of wrong, or rather it took another form. It wasn't The Court I wanted, but the power and the pleasure that generally goes with such houses. I wanted a front place, and I found one had to fight for it. Lots of the girls came from places even bigger and grander than my old home, and it seemed only natural to them that pen-

niless, shabby little Griselda Southern should be made to fetch and carry for them. You can't guess how fascinating it was, upsetting the established order of things in a big school. There were plenty of soldiers in the Long Gallery, and they gave me their blood, I think, though they wouldn't give me their acres. I liked fighting, as much for its own sake as for what one gained by it, and I had no objection to getting into hot water. You see, I had to replace that stolen house and all it stood for, and in time I found the secret I was looking for. I built houses that the law can't take away, and I was always queen of them. It's just as easy to be queen as goose-girl, if only you go the right way to work, and it's far pleasanter. Of course it was only a kind of play-acting, but it seemed to satisfy all one's childish demand for the exercise of power, and it really seemed to impress everybody. Even the teachers used to take me at my own valuation, to a great extent, and they always gave me the leading parts in the theatricals at the end of the term. There would have been such an appalling scene if they hadn't, and I certainly had a talent for mimicking the ways of grown-up people. I went through the junior school and through the senior school, getting more of my own way than you can possibly imagine, until we came to the last term. I was to play 'Rosalind,' and I studied the part day and night; and at the very last, mama wrote to say I was to come and join her. I've told you this before, but I haven't told you what a fund of unspent energy was in me when I came into that detestable house. There was nothing to do and I had been used to doing so much. There was nobody to toady me and I had been used to an admiring crowd at my heels. When I was nearly wild with boredom and disappointment, mama began to explain to me the exact meaning of our position. She had hinted at it often in her letters, but I never allowed myself to understand. She made the picture very vivid and very unpleasant. When I winced, she showed me the only door of escape, and, Harry, it was just the sort of door I liked best to force open. She told me that the house to which I

had come so unwillingly, was a stage, and the people on it were too lazy and unenterprising to play the drama waiting for them. They called Alva the chief lady, but she was nothing more than a doll, dressed up, put into certain positions, void of any incentive. There was truth enough in these assertions to make me listen to more. And mama began to flatter me. She told me that if I chose to take the trouble, I could set all these puppets into motion. They seemed in want of a leader, and I had been accustomed to lead. The temptation was not to be resisted. She lent me her emerald necklace, and I came down to dinner and began to talk. Now comes the dreadful part. Alva was so kind to me; you were so kind to me. You never guessed, either of you, that I angled for that kindness-for your pity. The game was intolerable because so easy. Long before it was over I began to be ashamed, but I couldn't stop; and here's my first excuse. From the moment you came near to meno-even before that-from the very first, when I scowled at you, like the spoiled schoolgirl I was, I cared. I was vexed when you turned away and looked at Alva. I wanted you back. I couldn't let her have you. She wasn't realshe was only a dream-lady. Any deliverer would do for her. I tricked you; I took you unfairly, but you were the first lover, and he isn't like any other, and-and-if we send him away, he never comes back."

Her voice faltered, and again she looked at him, but his

glance was still for the carpet.

"You're telling me more than I bargained for," he said, after what seemed to her an interminable interval. "We

haven't reached the letter, much less explained it."

"No. I've told you the first mistake, because all the others came out of it. I could never be at ease with you. I could never be my real self, because it wasn't my real self you had yielded to. I daren't speak frankly to you in case you should disapprove. But directly you were out of reach you began to speak very frankly to me. I used to dread your letters, after a time. They made it so plain that you hadn't wanted to marry Lady Southern's daughter; you

had meant to marry wisely. You had been worsted by an impulse—or was it by a face? In any case, I had taken your heart as a child takes a toy surreptitiously out of another child's nursery, and my sense of guilt wouldn't let me enjoy it. And the spring came, and I wasn't as old and wise and serious as I had been imagining during those long, dark winter months. The days grew warm, and the buds broke into flowers and the birds into a rapture, and I couldn't tell you that there was summer in my veins too, because you wrote of such different things: of patience and education and control. I had to curb my pen, but I couldn't curb all the emotions in my heart. I was too young, and—and they were too old. The wine had to ferment, and—and the little cup broke. Oh! I wonder if you are going to understand."

There was no such promise in his still face, and she turned abruptly from it towards that kindly, instigating

glow of firelight.

"I had to speak to some one. He came to Alva's wedding. He looked so cool and clever and safe. You set so many limits and I felt that he would set none. I rode with him; I asked him questions, but always-always-do you hear?—I brought the answers back to fit them to my one puzzle. I thought that-understanding man, I should be able to understand you. In my curiosity I let him come too near, but it was near my lip, never near my heart. I let him in, as one lets a tourist into a great house, but he only saw the common rooms. He knew it; he knew my day with him was an act of truancy—that I would go back—that the spirit of me never really came. He was not at all sorry to lose that letter, with its ridiculous tale of exaggeration. It seemed to give him something of what I had denied. Are you going to understand, Harry?"

"I understand, a little late in the day, that at least four lives have been sacrificed to yours and Lady Southern's pecuniary welfare. There is a proverb," he added, his eyes rising at last to meet hers, "from the Russian, I think,

that insists even a bishop will steal when very hungry. I don't doubt you two were very hungry when you plotted to rob me of my independence, but the law exacts its pound of flesh (shall we say spirit in this instance?) even from the bishop if it catches him, and you're not asking me for the common form of forgiveness. You're asking me for something very like sympathy. You've shown me a little girl training herself up to go in a given direction; now I'll show you a boy, in process of formation by circumstance and natural temper, and then perhaps you'll understand, in your turn, the difficulty of denying a barrier between the two. He was born in a back place-never knew any other; but that did not tend to reconcile him to his obvious discomforts. He, too, was determined to get a better one, but he went to work in another fashion. He had little imagination, and what he had he distrusted. He had no faith in wings. He had a natural antipathy to the butterfly; he distrusted its delicate beauty and despised the ephemeral quality of its happiness; I'm not sure he didn't think its existence a stain upon the morality of nature. His own battle with life was embarked upon in so different a spirit. By the sacrifice of his scant holidays, his scant amusements, those scant powers of imagination, he managed to article himself to ambition. He gave pretty nearly everything he had and got precious little back. He was abnormally poor and abnormally proud. Policy forced him to accept the crumbs from rich men's tables, but they could hardly be expected to nourish an amiability of temper. When, eventually, fortune gave him what he had struggled for, he was embittered by his own education, and he found more caprice than generosity in the hand that endowed him. You see, his success was no sort of answer to his efforts, and the gift was snatched from others who could ill afford to lose it. He studied in a rough and cynical school, where one took unlimited kicks and struggled to convert them into limited halfpence. Given a sudden wealth of halfpence, he was disposed to retain with the bounty a warm memory of the force of the kicks. To put it another way. You remember the men who worked in the vineyard all through the heat of the day; they received their promised wages, and they were satisfied, until they found that the men who came in at the eleventh hour were receiving the same. Now that lesson never came home to me; my sympathies were entirely with the complainants. You amused yourself for eleven hours out of the twelve, and in a fashion, it may be added, particularly abhorrent to me; and here you are, turning up to be paid on the same ratio as myself. You demand equality—sympathy—complete justification; but it isn't in my power to give you these."

He was not ill-pleased to have found and expressed this line of argument, but he was puzzled by her mode of

accepting it.

"Yes, I played for a time," she said at length, "but not

for so long as you suppose."

He lifted quizzical eyebrows, but she was staring past them, out towards a point of view yet vaguer than the one she had already exposed.

"There was our honeymoon. Tell me, did I ever really vex or disappoint you all those weeks, when we were so

dependent on one another for our happiness?"

"No." The admission was startled out of him.

"And yet my little girl was vastly different from your boy, on your own showing!"

"Well?" he said curiously.

"Somebody must have given up a good deal to let them

play together so contentedly; was it you?"

He made no reply, only sat staring at that new expression on her face. What was she aiming at? How did she contrive to elude the pillory, where she undoubtedly belonged,

on more counts than one, it now transpired?

"Slowly, very slowly," he found her saying, "you used to let out your feelings and opinions and thoughts. Did you ever wish you had kept any of them back? Did you ever say to yourself afterwards, 'Was I wise to tell her this? Was it dignified to confess that? Was it a mistake to admit the other?'"

After some consideration he gave her the absolution she demanded.

"No. I thought you honest and immature—careless but intelligent. This bolt came out of the blue," he finished, with an effort to rally enmity.

"You were happy then, in our German forest. I meant you to be happy;" and now there was pride in her accent.

"And were you less so?" he demanded incredulously.

"No. But I worked for our happiness. I didn't want to tell you this. It isn't my place. I thought you would remember and tell yourself, when the first moment of anger had gone. But you won't and I must. It's the case for my defense. You say our happiness came naturally, and I am going to show that it did not; that it could have been spoiled many times a day. How could your dogged little boy be satisfied with the company of a butterfly? I was a butterfly a year ago. I wanted to flutter in the sun without calculation; I wanted my play-room; I wanted the thousand and one fancies that children play with; I wanted to see fairies in the woodland and witches on the mountain; I wanted the tale of magic that makes life so unexacting and so interesting. And I had queer memories to encourage me-legacies from father, most of them. We used to go into the woods together. We hunted for plants and flowers and little beasts, and he told me stories about their lives. I can't recall a single fact, only one impression, always the same impression, and it's not an easy one to express. It had to do with the under-life of these cheery, simple things; it dealt with broken wings and buds that never came out, and yet—it wasn't a sad story. There was a champion in it, but he rode in darkness, guiding the hurt and the disappointed towards the sunshine that had passed them over. He infected me with a suspicion of presence that isn't authorized by fact. Don't frown at me; it's hard enough to find the figures I want, even in the stillness, in this red firelight. If I lose them, you'll never have your chance to understand. You didn't belong to father's world. You belonged exclusively to prose. I had to make a choice. I

had to belong to you or to my old fancies; and I chose to belong to you. Not without a struggle, though. When I went riding with Anthony the battle was raging. Until you came home I hovered round the decision. But from that day, when you came back to me with something warmer than patronage in your eyes, I belonged to you in every sense of the term. I said 'good-by' to that beloved playroom, and sat down to study. There were all the lost years to make up for, and it was no light task. I used to wake in the early morning, while you were sound asleep, and begin my lessons. There were birds in the trees outside, and they whistled the sweetest nonsense in at the windows -at least, it was nonsense according to the old code. They said, 'sweet-sweet,' which used to mean 'I love you-I love you'-no more, no less. But in the lesson-book there was a longer and a harsher translation. 'I love you' means 'come and be mine'; and that means again, 'bear with me, share with me the pang as well as the pleasure of life; give, and give, and give, till the pretty gay look of you has all gone, and the wooer calls elsewhere; till his voice is no more for you, but for your children and your children's children, and the countless myriads of creatures to come!' And again, there were fire-flies in the hedges; I wanted to call them fairies' lamps, as I had been used to do, but my grim teacher drove the fairies away and pointed to the lesson-book. Here was no note at all—only a glimmer; but first the light was pale and entreating—a 'will you?—will you?' then it was joyous-' I will-I will,' then it was pale again, as the glow was given off to others, and then no light at all—and—there was our circle again. We may be nothing but a link in a great chain, and the light must only lie on us for a little while. Out of the darkness we must come, and into the darkness we must go, and we must come and go willingly. Do you remember our journey to the Brocken? We climbed up and up, and always the mist grew thicker, until at the top there was nothing to be seen but a thick white curtain of vapor; but, as we stood looking into it, I saw the shapes of cities coming out, I saw towers and

slender spires, and rows and rows of tiny houses with a light in every window, like those we had seen on our first night in the mountains. I wanted to call it a city of legend. I wanted to people it with dream men and women, who ask nothing of you except a mysterious thrill, but I looked once more into the lesson-book, and I found it was the city of The people were real, and they were crying to me; they had come out of the darkness, or they were waiting for the light, and they were frightened and weak, and I had to promise to help them. It was the strangest promise. had no shape, and yet it pressed heavily on me all the way home and all through the days and weeks that followed. It was a demand so vast that I could not measure or analyze it—at least, not for a long time. Now add to this exorbitant demand the multitude of common daily tasks you asked of me: I was your friend, your confidante, your housekeeper, and you were satisfied-more, you were happy. That happiness was my gift to you; it was my atonement. Under a hundred little acts of sacrifice, under hundreds of legal retorts that I kept back, I buried the foolish girl who betrayed you; and now you bring her back and fasten her to me, as poor Francesca was fastened to her fellow-sinner, in the book we read in the winter. Don't you see that you fasten the true to the false, the dead to the living? Won't you see that there are grades of wifehood, and that I gave you more than the law demanded? I paid you back, Harry; indeed-indeed I did!"

And on the childish utterance her voice broke. She put out appealing hands, but she was swift to foresee his rejection of them, and she let them fall into her lap.

Again her expression was new to him. Much of the youth, all of the wistfulness went out of the mobile features. Darkly and fiercely her eye looked into his, hunting the answer to this incredible repulse.

CHAPTER XXXIV

DREAM-PEOPLE

"Well?" she said, with so sudden and complete a change of accent as literally to startle him; "you must have some-

thing to say, though it isn't what I hoped for."

There were no hidden tears behind the challenge of her glance, and, involuntarily, he thought of the sword of which she had once spoken: "It will flash out, some day, for a good cause or a bad one." It was out now, and against him and a cause, of whose probity he was far from convinced.

But he was not ready for recantation, and he was thankful for this call to action, thankful for the opportunity of drowning the sound of that still, small, treacherous voice, that had so nearly, at one moment, responded to her appeal.

He could not trust his half-hearted antagonism so near her magnetic person, and he moved abruptly from his place, to pace the room—that portion of it from which he could still watch each movement of her tense young body, each

play of expression on her virile face.

"I don't see what you could have hoped for," he began impatiently. "It was excellent imagery, but I've been brought up, as I showed you, to consider facts only. I like my lines straight, if a trifle narrow. I like to feel one can lean on them without fear of their snapping, even if one has to forego the chance of their turning into flowering staves under one's hands. You were quick to detect the unreality in Alva, quick to set her out of the material running, quick to draw a line of severance between her inflammations of mind and your own, but it's precisely that line you don't make clear to me. Your lesson-book is far too full of colored pictures to be really instructive or reliable, to my thinking."

He looked, almost eagerly, for some sign of dismay, but she evinced none. She only leant forward in her seat, planting her elbows on her knees, and dropping her chin into the cup formed by her two outspread hands.

"Go on," she said, so quietly as to prick him into some

degree of genuine indignation.

"Don't suppose I'm denying the skill in your defense. You've developed extraordinarily since the night when you told me of the horrid box in which fortune had trapped you, and persuaded me so easily to open the door for you. You've grown from an astute child into a remarkably intelligent woman; from a daring child into a remarkably audacious woman; from a pretty child," he added, stung into positive brutality by her unwinking gaze, "into a remarkably beautiful woman. I don't doubt the majority of men would give you absolution on any one of those counts, but it's my misfortune that I can't. You don't want humbug, so I'm bound to tell you that you're not the wife of my free choice; you're too tolerantly constructed. It's the only sort of accusation I bring against you; it's the only sort of punishment I've got to offer to your duplicity, and—if you can evade it—so much the better for you."

Again he looked for a flag of distress and surrender, and

again she disappointed his expectation.

"You grant me intelligence, courage, beauty," she said, after an interval. "It seems to me one ought to be able to do a great deal with that trio, if—if there were no inner curb."

The keen scrutiny of him was shot by a new expression, but it was warlike expression, without a doubt. The sword was moving rapidly, and, he began to fear, dangerously. Into the blue and childish glance there crept a shade of cunning, and, fascinated, he came to a halt opposite her chair.

"What do you mean? I don't understand you or your attitude."

She actually laughed. That half scale of musical notes that had so often delighted his ear by its purity of tone and its ease of delivery affected him very differently now. There was plenty of music in it still, but it was weird, unpleasantly suggestive music, and her small white teeth gleamed out at him with sinister effect. He thought of some wild animal driven into a corner, preparing to battle

for its remnant of a chance of life and liberty.

"Suppose, just suppose, Harry, that, having nothing left to gain by discretion and subservience, I should throw both to the wind. Suppose I play the witch, as you won't love or trust the woman. Suppose I 'run amok,' like the poor Indian fanatics, and shoot down the captains of the guard, with their gold lace and their serene sense of superiority. Are you wise—are you sure that you are wise, to drive me back upon that second self that sleeps in all of us?"

"The witch!" he rejoined, with what scorn he could muster at such short notice; "I don't believe in witches, as you

know."

"I think I could make you believe in mine," she said, her head going back and her hands falling once more into her "She doesn't ride a broomstick or stir strange herbs over a cauldron by the light of the moon, but she brews trouble and poison for all that, if put upon her mettle. Oh, there are tales one could rewrite—I've heard them and forgotten them; there are lives one could relive-I've seen them in a portrait upon the wall; there are passions buried deep, desperation could dig up! Intelligence! Audacity! Beauty! You give me all three with that superb air of disdain for them, and for me too; but have you forgotten that women have destroyed cities and preserved nations on a single one of them? You touch me with your cold finger of disapproval, and you think to set all my faculties out of action. I tell you," she went on, with substantial increase of excitement, "that you do something entirely different; instead, you set into action all the malign powers that I restrained out of my love for you, out of deference to your disposition. Only a few minutes ago I was ready to put my hands between yours as foolishly, as passively, as any slave-girl; but you shook them off. You set me free, and

you never tamed me. I tamed myself, to please the boy who drew his lines straight and narrow; but now I'm Griselda again. Don't hope to class me, for I'm not a Southern or a Venner, not even a wife and mother; I'm just a woman, baited too far by injustice, going back to her first nature, as the little wolf cub stolen in infancy, runs back, in the end, to her savage dam in the forest. Now what have you to say to such an elemental creature?"

"I'm inclined to say hysteria."

"That's an evasion. I'm calmer than you are—more decided, anyway."

"Then I'll say nothing."

"And that's merely running away," she commented dryly.

"Is it my line of division you're forcing me to define?" he asked, conscious that she had closed to him several possible ways of retreat on which the eye of personal dignity had been fixed furtively.

"Yes."

The blunt monosyllable served, at least, to spur him to-

wards brutality again.

"Oh, it isn't a serious one, Griselda. You implied that you made a mountain out of a molehill in that letter—well, you're doing much the same thing again. The line's no thicker and no longer than the average one drawn between a man and woman who have enjoyed or endured a year of one another's unadulterated society."

Her fancied that she winced ever so little, and he spoke

again with more confidence.

"For a year, more or less, we all expect the impossible; expect to play the exception to the prosaic rule. In spite of my education, in spite of temperament, I'll confess that I've had thoughts of you that would never bear the microscope of the philosopher. Only to-night, before dinner, I was the victim of an emotion so peculiar and so arbitrary, that if you'd asked me for five hundred, instead of fifty, pounds, I believe I should have given it. It's the look of you, I can only suppose. That mock air of surrender, that innocent, imploring curl of the lip; your mother has the same, or she

had once. You're very like her—far more like her than I imagined. In twenty years, I suppose, one will be able to hear the serpent hissing where the sweet bird sings, but,

unfortunately, the warning note sounds too late."

Would she never cry? Would she never collapse and leave unguarded one of those lines of retreat his vanity sought so desperately? She sat immovable, but tense, he thought, with passion. She still looked at him, and, in the stillness of the room, in the silence she delayed so long to break, it seemed to his nervous fancy that the veil spread so mercifully between the eye and every human ingredient was dissolving; hers seemed to pierce the bulwark of his artificial resistance, to stare with that cruel fixity directly into the chaos of which he was so conscious.

"You want me to cry," she said at last. "You want me to drop back in my chair limp and helpless and wretched, under the lash of your reproaches. You want to be able to come to me and say: 'I forgive you; we strong men always forgive the small and the feeble, just as we forgive the spaniel fawning at our knees his sins of commission and omission.' But the second self I told you of won't let me fawn or cry. It compels me to fight you and your unfair attitude."

"Unfair?" he echoed with heat, and drew closer; but

she met his angry face with an air of exaltation.

"I've lived," she said, clearly and deliberately, "and you haven't. I've been into the deep waters, while you rocked comfortably in that harbor you chose for yourself in boyhood, the harbor where one doesn't feel too much motion of the waves. I've wrestled with the sea-monsters; you contented yourself with saying, 'sea-monsters are extinct.' I told you of the little cup that broke when the wine fermented, but I drank the wine for all that, every drop of it, even the dregs, though there was the chance of death in them. I've been very near the man with the scythe, Harry. When you were asleep last winter, he used to shake me awake, to ask if I were afraid; then this second self used to come hurrying up out of the darkness to say 'no' to him.

If it could say 'no' to that grim visitor, it could say 'no' to you. You can't hurt me as you used to do, because you're nothing to me now, and I don't believe you're anything to yourself either."

She left him, he found, little to say, between her subtlety of instinct and the uncompromising quality of her revolt.

"You're forcing me to ask you for forgiveness?" he said, uncertainly.

"Yes, for you trifled with my spirit; I only trifled with

your position."

"And everything is to be forgiven to the spirit of license, nothing allowed to the spirit of limitation. Your demand seems to me too big for its shoes, considering, as one must consider in this world, the actual circumstances of the case."

"It wasn't a very big demand at first," she said simply.

"Your eyes are full of hatred," he objected further.

"They were full of tears a little while ago."

Irritably he moved again, throwing vacillating glances at

her rigid figure, her resolute face.

"Leave the line alone," he broke out at last. "If it hasn't any substance in it, it's bound to dissolve of itself in time."

"That would be a good way out for you," she said, with caustic emphasis, "but I don't want to let you out like that, with all the old flags of autocracy flying. Leave your line of division for another hour, and it will swell into a barrier that you will never be able to recross. And don't make the mistake of thinking that I shall be behind it, crying and repining, for I tell you-I warn you, that it is you who will be alone—shut out. Now do you understand the reason of my resistance? I shall have my boy. I shall have a hostage for your fair treatment, or else-a companion in misfortune. You've forgotten the child-you've forgotten the nature of the bond with me; you were so absorbed by the one between us. He is mine, all mine, for these first years. His mind's a green garden—my garden. I struggled to keep all the weeds out of it and all the happy little singing birds in; it was to be a place of peace and good-will. It can be something very different," she added, and again that suggestion of adult and evil experience inflamed the features of youth with a baneful effect.

"Griselda!" In his appalled face, in his voice, hoarse and unfamiliar, she could read at length his recoil from that intolerable pose of dispassionate yet bitter criticism.

"Ah, you shrink now," she went on triumphantly, "I'm touching intimate and valuable stuff. You're frightened now. It's I who have the power and the will to hurt. You took advantage of my cause when it was weak and uncertain how to defend itself, and now I take advantage of yours, which is a thousand times weaker. You knew all the time that it was the truth I gave you, that I was honest from the moment I came to you, but your prejudice, your pride, that fastidious form of education you chose, wouldn't allow you to say so. You gave me to these unnatural and brutal thoughts of passion and retaliation, as cowards fling their children to the wolves, hoping to check the deadly pursuit. The children are gone, torn, dead; those kindly, pretty children you used to like to play with in your leisure hours. They won't come back. You'll call for them; you'll want them, but they've passed out of your circle of influence. And the sacrifice of them won't even be of use, for the wolves will follow you again; they'll tear you, too, in the end, and I'm glad. I want you torn-out of your complacency, out of your insufferable egoism."

It was impossible to offer platitudes, however conciliatory in nature, to such a fury as now inspired her mood, and, with a sense of defeat he turned from her again and made his way to the far end of the room, into the seclusion of one

of the open windows.

His line of division assuredly began to look ridiculous beside the one she had roused herself to define; his was to have been washed out in her tears, ten minutes or so after he had relieved his temper by drawing it—but—she refused to shed any tears.

It was a relief, almost a necessity, to look out into the placidity of the dim garden, to inhale the sweet and sooth-

ing scent drifting up from the invisible flower-beds. It was a relief to see nothing distinctly. Spectral and fantastically beautiful, the shapes of the trees loomed out of the darkness; their long feathery arms trembled at intervals, under the breath of a light and fitful wind; the lawn was like a silver carpet, so ephemeral in quality that it was impossible to distinguish the point at which it melted into the dull blue of the summer night. Here was absence of all assertion. In such an atmosphere it was inevitable that his hold upon antagonism, never altogether secure, should relax yet further, that the echo of her voice should sound again on the still air, and sound arrestingly.

"I wanted to call it a city of legend, but I didn't do it. I looked into the lesson-book and it was the city of life."

There was life hidden in the almost motionless garden; there were a thousand eyes, bright and bold as hers, watching him out of its depths; they too seemed to be awaiting his decision, his recantation, not with anxiety of curiosity, but with the same passionate confidence that pressed so poignantly upon his pride.

Again the voice, with its incongruous ring of childhood,

beat its argument into his understanding.

"I worked for our happiness; you think it came naturally, but it didn't. It could have been spoiled many times a

day."

An instinct, smothered, not destroyed, rose to corroborate the sincerity of the vaunt. He saw her lip quiver and close upon some retort to which he had unquestionably laid himself open. He had been content, at the time, to call the silence her resignation of the point of advantage, an ignorance of the methods of polite warfare. Now he saw it for what it had assuredly been—atonement—the payment of that old debt, fretting to a sensitive conscience. He winced and looked another way, but only to find recrimination in a yet more malignant form.

"You're nothing to me; I don't believe you're anything to

yourself."

The accusation had truth enough in it to sting. Her vital

girl brought blood to the cheek of his priggish boy. She might be—she was—faulty, and perhaps not fully civilized, but it was life she battled with, not affectations. She must have been driven far into the fastnesses on her pleasure-loving nature, he now paused to remember, to find and produce those similes he had presumed to ridicule. Even from the first they had affected his judgment, and it had cost him an effort to deny them their right to vitality. They were about him now, like the flowers of a deeply-rooted religion springing up in unexpected places.

He became aware of movement, aware that she had left her seat and was behind him, almost within touch. It was a relief to know that she must be looking out with him into the shadowy world outside, breathing with him that sweet, soothing scent that acted like a drug upon the violence of human nature. She, too, would find it hard to be angry, to be self-centered, under the benign spell brooding so near to

them.

"I want you back," he said suddenly, sharply, but without turning. "As a witch, or a tiger-cat—as what you please, Griselda, but—I must have you back."

"They burn the witches in your country, and they chain up the wild beasts; I'll only come back to liberty—and love."

Insensibly her voice softened on the last word, and it brought him round to face her. He put out eager hands, but she raised her own with a gesture of repudiation he was afraid to disobey.

"Not yet, not so easily and quickly. I'm bound to come directly you ask me to; but I must have fair terms, for the sake of others as well as myself. You're retracting tacitly, but you must retract openly."

"Find me the terms of surrender," he said.

But she shook her head, both at the words and at the accent, with its slight inflection of levity.

"You must find them for yourself. They must be your

words, not mine."

"Shall I say I was imperfectly educated?" he began tentatively, and saw her muscles relax yet a little more, as though she resigned another degree of her animosity. "That I heard nothing in that first school in the mountains except the bell for breakfast? Would you be satisfied with that?"

The ghost of a smile flickered into her eyes and out again.

"It might satisfy me-but-it doesn't quite satisfy my

sex."

"That I'm afraid of you," he went on more confidently, drawing inspiration and generosity from her softened aspect. "Afraid of those hidden and malign powers you've dug up to-night—afraid, mortally afraid, of that second self—afraid, too, of those myths and bogies I've made such persistent game of. If I were to admit a first consciousness of unreality and mythicalness in myself—a sense at all events of incompletion and distrust; would such

confessions bring you back?"

"Back to you?-yes-but not back to my old condition," she answered mournfully. "I can't answer as I used to, like a ventriloquist's doll. You used to hypnotize me into saying what you wanted to hear. Husbands and children don't look just as they used to do. I don't want to be tied too firmly to them. It isn't safe. Life used to be a giant toy, now it's a giant wheel; if you go near, if you touch it with you finger, the finger is torn off, and you go maimed all your days. I want to feel less. I'd like to be a flower," she added wistfully, "coming up without a pang and going away again without a fear. I want to give nothing but a sweet scent and a pretty color and a bud or two, and to take nothing in return but the air and the sunshine, and a tiny patch of brown earth. I'm not brave as I used to be; the pluck goes with the ignorance-more's the pity! I want to be beaten on by wind and rain, not by these terrible exacting human passions. I think I'd like best of all to be a mermaid, with half a human shape, and a few human habits to keep me occupied; it must be lovely to sit on a rock by moonlight and comb your hair, and sing and call to the sailors on the Rhine—only, they must never come."

Grateful for the unmistakable decrease of tragedy in her last phrases, he sounded the light note yet more decidedly.

"And while you comb your hair and sing to those in-

attentive sailors, what becomes of me and my boy?"

The smile hovered against her will, it seemed, about the tremulous mouth.

"You're both to sit upon the beach and mourn, and mourn, and mourn. I'm to begin and care very little, but you are still to care a great deal."

"Show me a less fantastic figure," he begged; "show me

a dimple—the one I've always given way to."

"Show me this, show me that," she mocked, but now with no sincerity of anger. "Always the mountebank, always your dancing-girl, to be shaken before taken, to be petted, patronized, bullied as your mood exacts; to cater year in, year out, to your call for light refreshment. Listen."

"To more legends of our infancy? Let's bury the children with the hatchet," he suggested, fencing once more

with his ancient enemy.

"No; to the clock. It's striking twelve. Midnight, Harry; 'the hour when graves give up their dead,' when you must give up your secret; the hour when the masqueraders take off their dominoes; you must take off yours; I must see the face behind."

She laid her arms about his neck, but deliberately rather than tenderly; they set a certain distance which he did not

attempt to reduce.

"It's the face of a monster," he said presently, influenced by the quality of her scrutiny. "He took a dozen wives as carelessly, as immorally, as any potentate of the East, and now he finds behind each veil, not the slave he bargained for, but an exacting mistress. He's aptly punished, and you're well revenged. Don't move; don't alter your expression, and I'll find more to tell you—further and blacker depths of profanity to expose."

But with a cry of what sounded like terror, she broke the spell that urged him into confession, and laid a hand across

his lips.

"No, no. Put the domino back. I've seen enough; I've heard enough. I must fight it out with my barbarian in the dark. I must have my tale of magic. It isn't in the forest or in the play-room; it isn't even in the heart of an ignorant child, though it's there, I think, that the seed is sown-it's here, in your mysterious and sometimes cruel demand on me, in my children's demand on me; it's hidden in the daily life that seems to run so simply and monotonously from meal to meal, from pinafore to shroud. mustn't talk of it any more or it will evaporate, and it has to brighten the way for a great many people. And now I can see the Long Gallery that fortune took away when I was a little girl, and it's longer than ever; such a mighty row of lords and ladies, and they care nothing for the law of entail; they're all looking down to smile or frown on us, begging us to carry on the line to keep it straight." But here a flippant thought checked her intensity; the dimple came again; the blue eyes began to twinkle. "The straight line, Harry—I'll have to let you draw it after all; but oh, what a straight and uncompromising line it is!"

She leant forward, curving her arms till she lay ensconced

in his, her head nestling into the hollow of his neck.

"You'll always be more or less rigid," she whispered from her shelter, "and I must always be content to wind myself about you, breaking the sharpness of the line; no more than the flower I sighed to be; no more than a climbing rose about a chill iron pillar."

"Metal is as slow to cool as to ignite," he whispered back; "couldn't my climbing rose find comfort in that thought?"

He angled for some further sweeter word of capitulation; he bent his ear closer to catch it, and found the lobe fast between her small sharp teeth; their impress tightened

until he was compelled to laugh and wince.

"Your rose has common thorns," she said, releasing him and leaning back to study the effect of this unexpected manœuvre. "She has to prick where and when and how she can. You're not often near enough to feel her protest against absolute monarchy. Have I hurt you?"

"There's more bewilderment than pain," he answered, rubbing the wounded ear. "I battle with a visionary, yield to a shrew; I came up for trial before a row of preternaturally shrewd and pitiless jurymen, and I'm found guilty of murder in the first degree; but when I get up with knocking knees to confront the man in the black cap, there's nothing more alarming on the judge's bench than the little wolf-cub you alluded to, giving sentence of punishment after the fashion of its primitive kind. Are we dream-people, Griselda? Is this a dream-quarrel?—and, if so, whose quarrel? as Alice inquired so pertinently in Wonderland?"

"Dream-people!" she echoed, shaking off the pleasant lethargy invading her senses. "With what scorn you speak of them! as though to be fast in the flesh, to be tied to a thousand limits, were actually something to brag about. No wonder they laugh so weirdly when they catch us alone in a dark corner; no wonder they play rather cruelly with our fears and susceptibilities; they've plenty of insults to avenge. Dream-people! Why, they're the legions of all those who 'have been,' and 'will be,' while we are no more than the tiny temporary army of 'what is.' They're the essence of all the moods and passions that have licked the world into its present shape, and we're only the creatures bound to accept that shape, bound to get our living off what they've established. We tear them into ribbons with our tongues; we lash them with our doctrines; we cut them up, times out of number, with every new scientific instrument we discover—and the pieces always form again! You'd expect that to teach us respect and restraint, but not a bit of it. Oh, it's impious, it's degrading and ridiculous, to class and condemn what we can't fathom or influence. These forces have the power to pass through and out of us, raising the hair on our heads, turning our blood hot and cold; they're everything and nothing; they're everywhere and nowhere. When you said to-night that you were conscious of unreality in yourself, you seemed suddenly to expand, to touch hands with these emancipated dream-people, to give up something petty and personal, and absorb, in exchange, something vast

and portentous. But you're hiding a smile—or is it a yawn? Well, here's my last word, truly the last: it's these dreampeople who urge us into real communion with one another. We were very near divorce when they stepped in and snatched the cheque from me, and defied Warren, and set us at each other's throats, and made this peaceful room hideous with passion. They brought me into your arms tonight, and you mustn't laugh at them any more than you would laugh at the priest who lays your wife's hand in yours."

"It's uncommonly pretty logic; but how are you going to prove the truth of it?"

She was quick to recognize and to respond to this polite but peremptory summons to earth.

Her face curled up roguishly, dropping, with its gravity, a

dozen years.

"You think you've silenced me; you think you've set me the impossible last task that the evil genius in legend always sets the long-suffering heroine; but I shall accomplish it, as surely as she always did. To prove the truth of my logic to a sceptic of your order is the easiest thing in the world; I've only got to borrow the argument of the man who swore to prove that the moon was made of green cheese. He said, 'Either it is, or it isn't; well, we know it isn't, therefore it is.'"

